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January 9, 1883.

Vol. XI.

Single
Number.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 Cents.

No. 285.

DENVER DOLL'S DECOY; or, Little Bill's Bonanza.

BEING No. 3 OF THE "DENVER DOLL" SERIES.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSERUD ROR" NOVELS, "GILT-EDGED DICK," "BONANZA BILL," ETC., ETC.



"NOT SO FAST, POSY!" SAID DENVER DOLL CALMLY, AS SHE SHOVED A REVOLVER IN FRONT OF THE STRANGE WOMAN'S FACE.

Denver Doll's Decoy;

OR,
LITTLE BILL'S BONANZA.

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"ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A VILLAINOUS BARGAIN.

"SH! Hush your clatter!"

The speaker was a dark-browed, black mustached personage, of some forty years or more, whose face showed the scars resulting from several wounds, and whose general aspect was in no way pleasing.

He was of heavy build, and dressed in miner's habiliments, while his belt bristled with weapons.

The scene was the interior of a rude log cabin, against one of the walls of which the speaker sat tipped back in a chair.

His remarks were addressed to a quartette of fellows, eminently as evil-looking as himself, who were congregated around a table wrangling over a game of cards.

One of these—a long, powerful-looking ruffian—turned a scowling face toward the speaker.

"Reckon 'tain't your game, Cap!" he growled. "I don't allow no skin game when I've got a hand in, an' ye can bet on that!"

"Look out!" the captain cried sternly; "none of your back change, Muggins, or I'll remind you who's boss here. I said hush that clatter, and I mean it. I expect visitors to-night, and I want order."

The others exchanged glances, but none of them offered a reply except Muggins:

"It's about time you tackled suthin' to fetch in shekels, ef ye want ter keep the gang together. This bein' shet up like a rat in a trap ain't what it's cracked up to be," he grunted, angrily.

"Maybe you'd rather leave the trap, and fall into the hands of the handsome horse-thief catcher, Big Buckskin," the captain sneered. "You know he's on our trail, and has sworn to wipe every mother's son of us out, for running off his famous stallion, Star Face. He ain't the only one as wants ter see us. The Murdock Brothers have quite an extensive acquaintance, you know, and Monk Muggins isn't exactly bold enough to look the law in the face."

"I'm every bit as brave as you are, Burk Murdock—brave enough, anyhow, that I'm devilish sick o' bein' cooped up here."

"Well, you may have a chance to get out and distinguish yourself, after to-night," the captain answered, resuming his pipe, a strange glitter in his eyes.

The Murdock Brothers and the man Muggins had, for a long period, made themselves notorious as a band of desperadoes throughout the far West, the mining districts of Idaho being the scene of most of their depredations.

There were two of the Murdocks, but the whole party were generally known as the Murdock Brothers, from the fact that where one went the others could generally be found.

They were stage robbers, murderers, and horse-thieves, and were wanted by the authorities for several other phases of criminal offense, one of their most relentless foes being a miner and scout known as Big Buckskin.

Burk Murdock was well fitted to take the leadership. He was a man whom nature had evidently created dead to all moral and honest purpose; he was wily and cunning as a fox in many things, while in others he threw off the cloak of the polished villain, and was rough and brutal.

Jack, his own brother, was hardly as bad as his brother, although he was guilty of many misdemeanors. He did not have so much evil in his heart—was wild and reckless, and was managed pretty much to suit the will of his elder brother.

He was some four-and-twenty years of age, and although hardly good-looking, had perhaps less of the viciousness expressed in his countenance than his comrades had.

The real names of the other two outlaws were Jim Sanders and Hank Hartly, and they were ruffians to the core, serving as tools for Captain Burk to work with.

The rendezvous which we find the gang occupying was a tumble-down log-cabin, down in

the heart of a deep mountain-gulch, which was densely wooded with fir-pines.

A person unacquainted with the fact could have passed within a dozen yards of the cabin, without suspecting the existence of such a habitation.

It was for this reason that the Murdocks had lately taken possession of it, when dodging a hunt that was being made for them, led by Big Buckskin.

"Who are these visitors?" Muggins demanded, as he played his cards, and finally threw up his hand.

"An old cove from Boise City—an' would ye believe it, he's a parson, they say! Got a note from Red Eagle, by the carrier-pigeon, sayin' as how the old gent wanted a job did, an' was willin' ter slap up t e swag liberally."

"Some pious-faced detective, I'll bet!"

"No, I reckon not, or Red Eagle wouldn't 'a' recommended him. The Injun never's got us inter trouble yet, and he's sent us many a pointer. I can read the chap, as soon as the red-skin fetches him."

"Will they come alone?"

"I reckon so. Hello!"

The exclamation was caused by a heavy rap upon the door.

Every man was upon his feet in an instant, and while the captain stepped toward the door, with a revolver in his grasp, the others glided behind a curtain that divided off a portion of the room.

Without apparent trepidation, Captain Burk opened the door and peered out.

"Who's that?" he demanded, gruffly.

"George Washington Gum, at your sarvice!" a cracked, wheezy voice replied, and at the same time the speaker pushed forward into the cabin.

Murdock closed and barred the door, and then turned to survey his visitor. He saw before him a long, exceedingly lean individual, who was dressed in a very loud checkered suit, white shirt, Piccadilly collar, and white silk hat—an individual with a face somewhat resembling that of a monkey, with its *aesthetic* mouth, flat nose, and startling side whiskers, of a decidedly "yaller" color.

His face was distorted by a profuse grin, and his large, cat-like eyes beamed resplendently upon the outlaw chief.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" the captain thundered, so ferociously that a man of ordinary nerves would surely have been startled; but the intruder grinned the harder, and advanced and peered with one eye into the tube of the weapon Murdock had leveled at him.

"It's not necessary to waste powder on me, dear sir, as I am bullet-proof. I have been shot with cannon balls countless times, and they never fazed me; I have been blown up with giant powder, forty miles into etheria, and still live to tell of it; I have been struck upon the cheek with lightning, and it glanced off and killed my washerwoman, who was in the act of presenting her bill; yea, I have embraced death in a hundred ways, but 'twere no use—none whatever. Gum is my name—George Washington Gum, at yer sarvice—a man of nerve enough to chew off the paint from a duke's tally-ho. I am a book-agent, sir—a canvasser for great and useful books of knowledge—anything, in fact, from a spelling-book to the Holy Writ. I have a very useful little work here, entitled "How to Get Rich." Let me show it to you—costs nothing to read the first four lines."

"Don't want it," the captain growled. "I get my stamps slittin' weazands!"

"Exactly! This work will be of incalculable value to you. It is a complete and systematic treatise on the art of disembodiment spirits with quickness and safety, including several notes compiled from distinguished executioners."

"Git out! Don't want it!"

"No? Well, I have another book on How to Make Love!"

"Bah! Don't want it!"

"Do you want a cook book?"

"No!"

"Nor a Materia Medica—a complete doctor and drug store all in one?"

"No!"

"Ah! but I have it now—a book of Oscar Wilde's poems. You greatly resemble Oscar!"

"I don't want none of your books, I say. Clear out of here!"

"But, hold on! It just occurs to me where I can tinkle you in a tender spot. I have a neat little book here on farming, by Greeley. Just the thing for a man who contemplates growing up with this beautiful country!"

"No! no! no!" the captain roared. "If I

have to tell you no, again, I'll blow your fool's brains out."

"No ye won't," G. Washington Gum declared, emphatically. "Why, I've been banged away at by forty cannons, an' hit that many times by thousand-pound balls, and wasn't even fazed. Got hit on the cheek wi' a fiery meteor, but it recoiled ten mile, while I went home complainin' about the size of the musketoes that season. Fell into a red-hot blast furnace, once, and put the fire out just to pay up a grudge I had against the boss molder. Been run over by several train of cars, and was the only man to escape alive."

"You are the most infamous liar of liars I ever met!" Murdock growled. "You have plenty of gab, no doubt, but I'll guarantee I can take some of the conceit out of you. Boys!"

The four outlaws advanced from behind the curtain, with drawn revolvers, and formed in line, in front of the lean individual, who nodded with a supremely ludicrous grin.

"How are you gents? Glad to meet you. My name is Gum. I have the honor of representing a number of prominent book publishing firms, in the East, whose most popular works I am introducing. I have an interesting book here, entitled 'How to Live Forever.' I know it is just what you want."

The brothers Murdock did not reply, but eyed the canvasser with grim and suspicious glances.

Captain Burk made the answer:

"D'ye see them fellers, young man?" he demanded. "Well, they're my brothers, an' four as bad customers as walk in boots. Now, d'ye know what we're goin' to do?"

"Purchase this beautiful little work I have here, entitled 'How to Escape Justice!'" Gum said, with a bright expression of anticipation.

"Not by a cussed sight. D'ye know what an outlaw is?"

"You bet! I have a beautiful little biography of some of the more prominent outlaws of the century!"

"Curse your books! We are outlaws, ef ye want to know it, and this is our trap. To let you escape would be too dangerous, and therefore there remains but one thing else to do. We've got to kill you. How do you like that?"

"Not at all. It is important that I should live, as my work is of vital importance to the reading and publishing world. Let me depart, and I'll vow I won't never tell on ye."

"Ho! ho! That would be sort of a snap, wouldn't it? But, you see, I am not doing business that way. This hyar's a partnership concern o' ours, and if you want to put in five thousand dollars, and become one of us, we'll give ye a show fer your life. Otherwise you have but five minutes to live!"

"Five thousand dollars? Why, bless your dear heart, I haven't seen five thousand dollars in twenty years! My whole cash assets is ten big old-fashioned coppers!"

"Search the man!" the captain ordered.

The book-agent was forced to throw up his arms, and he was thoroughly searched.

The canvassing samples of a number of different books were found, in addition to his stock in trade of cash, consisting of ten old-fashioned coppers.

That was all.

There was nothing more to show that he was aught different from what he claimed to be.

Captain Murdock appeared to be disappointed. He had suspected that the book-agent was a detective, but the failure to discover any evidence of such a fact seemed to annoy him.

"Well, it don't matter, anyhow," he growled.

"You've got to die, and so get ready. You have five minutes in which to say your prayers. Boys, when I say 'Ready,' blow his gizzard out!"

What the result would have been is not hard to say had not three significant taps came upon the door at that instant.

The taps, however, caused the captain to start and glare down upon the book agent.

"Get you quietly behind yonder curtain!" he hissed, "and if you utter so much as a sound while I'm gone I'll send the boys in to cut your heart out!"

Evidently glad to escape punishment, the man of gab glided to the cover with alacrity.

Captain Murdock then advanced to the door and called out:

"Who's there?"

"Red Eagle," was the answer, in a guttural tone.

"Give the password, then."

"Pigeon carries news," came back.

The captain then opened the door and admitted a stalwart young savage, who was in turn followed by two other persons.

The red-skin was tall and straight as an arrow, and was rather handsome, his face and eyes giving expression of more than ordinary Indian intelligence.

Of his companions, one was an elderly man and the other a young lady.

The former was apparently fifty years of age, and was a chubby little smooth-faced, gray-haired man of decidedly clerical aspect.

The young woman looked to be about four-and-twenty years of age, and was exceedingly pretty, both in face and form. Hers was a brunette complexion, with deep, liquid black eyes, hair to match, and teeth of the pearliest type, which gleamed from between a tempting pair of lips.

Both she and the gentleman were plainly but richly attired, and evidently occupied a higher station in life than those they had come to visit.

At Burk Murdock's request they became seated.

The outlaw then turned to Red Eagle.

"Well, Injun, who are these people?" he demanded.

"The White Chief received the message?"

"Yes."

"This is the pale-face," and the red-skin indicated the clerical party.

To him Murdock then turned.

"Well, sir, what can I do for you?" he asked. "My friend made known to me your desire to see me, but did not state your errand."

"Likely, because I gave him no authority to do so," the clerical party declared. "I am the Reverend Jubal Andre, of Boise—not a regular practitioner of ministry, but an exhorter and revivalist."

"Yes, you look it!" the captain said, with a smirk. "Reckon ye won't make much of a headway convertin' this gang."

"I came not for such a purpose. 'Tis truly said that every person must sin occasionally, as a case of necessity, and I believe it. There are times in the life of every man when it is a virtue to protect himself, and that is why I am here. You are what are known as the Murdock Brothers?"

"Exactly."

"I have frequently heard it said that you were none too scrupulous how you made your money as long as you made it?"

"The report does us proud," Burk Murdock assured. "When we see the swag ready, we ain't afeard to work nor ain't choosers o' the sort o' job."

"Very well; I have a case which I am disposed to place in your charge. And there is good money to back it. Let me relate it, and you will then see that I am not sinning, even though a divine, in protecting myself. Eleven years ago, when but a child of fifteen, my daughter Agnes, here, was enticed into marriage with a worthless, roving vagabond, named Joseph Wilton. I was away at the time, but the marriage was rendered legal, from the fact that my wife, since deceased, gave her sanction."

"As soon as I learned of the matter I caused a separation, by having Wilton arrested and sentenced to eight years for manslaughter, in an eastern prison, although it cost me much to procure his conviction. His time expired three years ago, and I have learned that he is back in the West again. Being a desperate character, my life is in jeopardy, and it is but a humane precaution, you know, that I should look out for myself."

"Then, again, there are other reasons why I should have him disposed of. Shortly after the separation my child fell heir to an immense landed estate in Texas, which has since so greatly improved in value that it is advisable to sell it. This she cannot do until Wilton joins in giving a deed. Nor is this all."

"A distant titled relative of mine, Sir Royal Rignold, desires my daughter's hand in marriage, and a match has been arranged. Of course this marriage cannot be consummated until Wilton is put out of the way."

"Well, d'ye want his throat cut?" Captain Burk demanded.

"We are not particular what happens to him, as long as he never turns up, nor any evidences of a former marriage. There you have it in a nutshell."

"Dunno!" the outlaw muttered. "Hev to think 'bout this 'ere matter. Might not pay. Your gal got a certificate?"

"No! but Wilton has. He used to carry it in a left inside pocket of his vest. That destroyed, but one evidence of the marriage remains."

"What is it?"

"A child, some ten years of age now, which resulted from the union. This was taken away, and, as we supposed, died in a foundling hos-

pital; but recently we received a letter from a woman to whom we had intrusted it, that the child was alive and well, and traveling with a detective through the West."

"Humph! d'ye suppose I'm going to search all over the West for one kid!" Murdock demanded. "You're mistaken if you do. Whar's the other feller?"

"He is somewhere's in this part of Idaho. He does not go under his own name now, but is known as Big Buckskin!"

Murdock uttered an exclamation!

"I've heard of the fellow!" he said. "He's a hard customer to undertake to corral. What's your best figures for the job?"

The clerical rascal scratched his head a moment, and then answered:

"Well, since there is a prospect that you can do the work within a reasonably short length of time, I'll give you and your men each one dollar a day until the job is finished, within one month!"

Not only did the captain burst out into a roar of laughter, but his men also joined in chorus.

"Your liberality is something terrible to contemplate!" Murdock declared. "But, notwithstanding its magnitude, it does not appeal to our greed for gold. We gentlemen of leisure never enter into a speculation unless we foresee a reasonable profit."

"But, surely, that is a reasonable sum. Look at the men that have no employment whatever."

"Can't help that. Pious pilgrims kin afford to be poor. We rascals hev got to save up cash with which to purchase fire protectors for the hereafter. Savy? The least that we can tackle your job for is a thousand dollars, spot cash!"

Jubal Andre put up his hands in horror.

"Impossible! I have not so much in the world!" he gasped.

"You lie!" Murdock replied. "I happen to be acquainted up in Boise, and you're worth ten thousand in stock of the Clipper mine alone. So don't add falsehood to your other reverend sins."

Andre did not answer for a moment, but exchanged glances with his daughter, as if questioning her what he should say.

"The fact of the case is," the captain went on, "I ain't very particular about undertakin' the job, anyhow. My opinion o' you is, that you're a reg'lar old shyster what couldn't be trusted out o' sight. I've got kind of an achin' in my left lung that I could make more money by actin' square, fer one't, an' sidin' in wi' the man you're tryin' to knock under—Big Buckskin!"

The parson looked decidedly nervous at this.

"Oh! no! no! you are very wrong. I am a man of honor and standard reputation. I don't want you to think I am stingy, and so I'll give you a thousand now, and when you finish the job, and give me the certificate, together with proof that Joe Wilton is forever silenced, I'll give you another thousand. It is understood, however, that if you can find the boy, you'll go for him also!"

"All right. We'll call it a bargain. I'll lay for Big Buckskin at once. Whack over your ducats."

From an inner pocket, the reverend scoundrel extracted a rather lean wallet, and produced from it several bills, which he carefully counted over, and then handed to the desperado leader.

"There is a thousand dollars. It is a big sum, but I will not begrudge it, nor as much more, if you perform your part of the compact promptly."

"You can depend on my fixing the matter to your satisfaction as soon as I can run the cuss down," Burk Murdock growled, as he ungraciously shoved the money down into his pocket. "We've a grudge to wipe out on him ourselves—so we may's well combine bizness with pleasure. Any peculiar mark on the kid?"

"Yes. Upon his right arm, above the elbow, is a birth mark which at the time we last saw him, almost accurately resembled an owl!"

"So it's a boy, eh? What's the name?"

"William."

"Does Big Buckskin know of the existence of such a boy?"

"Possibly, though I am not certain."

"Well, you can go now. Reckon I can get along with what information you've given me. When I have anything particular to report, I will call upon you."

The dismissal was peremptory, and accordingly the Andres and Red Eagle took their departure.

When they were gone, Murdock ordered G. Washington Gum to advance from his concealment behind the curtain.

He did not obey, and a hasty examination was made, when it was found that the worthy and imperishable book-agent had effected his escape, through a rear door, which, by some mistake, had been left unlocked.

CHAPTER II.

BILL'S BONANZA AND THE WHITE HAIRIED GUEST.

OVER a range of sharp and rugged mountains, beyond the dismal place where the brothers Murdock kept their rendezvous, was another gulch, fully as rough and wild as its neighbor, but not timbered to any particular degree, except with scattering shrubs and scrub pines.

A little stream of water cut a serpentine course through the gulch, and made the scene look a little less dreary than it would otherwise have been, as did also a stage trail, that was probably not used constantly, as grass grew in the road.

Nevertheless, the trail ran direct south to Boise City from a cluster of mining towns a hundred miles north, and had a bi-weekly stage each way.

At the point where we wish to fasten the attention, the gulch was not quite half a mile wide, including the raise or mountain foot-slope, but the scenery was surpassingly grand, the hoary peaks rising to the right and left with colossal dignity, and bearing very little foliage or forest except now and then a scattering patch.

The bottom of the gulch was of a sandy formation, yet strewn with a plentitude of huge boulders.

Near the bank of the stream stood a serviceable shanty, built partly of slabs and partly of logs.

It had no particularly noticeable characteristic; it was one just like hundreds which could be found through the far West.

Over the door a creaking, rudely lettered sign was suspended, which bore the somewhat novel inscription:

"LITTLE BILL'S BONANZA."

"WM. BETHEL, PROPRIETOR."

If meant for a hotel, it was certainly set down in rather an odd place, for Bill's Bonanza only had a population of two persons, and they were little Bill Bethel and his fearless patron and partner, Denver Doll, the Detective Queen.

Roaming through the Northwest, the peculiarly-matched pair had halted for a night's rest, where the shanty now stood; and, while the dashing young detective was engaged in roasting some venison, Little Bill had picked up a stone to hurl at a vulture, which was complacently watching them from a neighboring boulder. Before throwing it, however, the glitter of the firelight upon it had attracted his attention and subsequent examination proved that he held in his hand a nugget of gold about the size of a hen's egg.

"Hurrah, Dollbaby! I've scooped ont'er a bonanza, sure's a turkey lays freckled eggs! Look byar, wull ye! Ain't that a beauty?"

From that discovery sprung the fact that there was gold in the gulch, and Doll and Little Bill agreed that it would be appropriate to name the new strike Little Bill's Bonanza, which was promptly done, and the first habitation was erected.

Fearful that their rich claim would attract unwelcome crowds to the place, the partners used the precaution of working the placers only when they were sanguine of not being discovered, which was generally in the earlier part of each day.

Their shanty, however, attracted not a little attention from the stagers who passed, and once the stage had halted at the solicitation of a speculator, who desired to know what the two were doing in that unproductive region.

Ready always, Denver Doll turned off suspicion by pointing to a number of bear and other fur-bearing skins, which were tacked up against the shanty to cure.

"B'ars aire thicker nor fleas on a dog!" she observed. "Catch one nigh every night."

"Humph! didn't know but you'd struck gold!" was the gruff reply, after which the stage rolled on.

Subsequently the stage dashed through Little Bill's Bonanza, without deigning to stop, except when Denver Doll occasionally boarded it, for a trip to Boise City.

Up to the time we reintroduce them to the reader, Doll and Little Bill had occupied their claim two months, and had made a formal purchase of one hundred acres of the gulch bottom from the Government, in order to protect themselves from invasion. Sooner or later it would

come, as they were well aware, and it was best to be prepared.

At last, one evening as they were sitting in the mellow moonlight in front of the shanty, engaged in weighing what dust they had panned out that day, they were interrupted by the approach from up the gulch of a horseman.

As he drew near, Denver Doll was able to make out that he was an equestrian of decidedly cavalier bearing, and was mounted upon a horse of thorough mettle and exceeding beauty.

As he finally drew rein before the shanty, she was better able to inventory him, and perceived that he was a well proportioned man, of ripe old age, the only physical defect noticeable being a painful hump on his back.

His hair was worn long over his shoulders, and was snowy white. A sweeping beard and mustache to match ornamented the better portion of his face, and gave him at once a striking and reverential appearance.

His attire, however, was well worn and torn. He tipped his sombrero politely as he drew rein, and cleared his throat with an "ahem!"

"Excuse me, please," he said, "but might I trouble you by asking how far it is from here to Boise City?"

"A right good day's journey," Denver Doll replied.

"And are there no camps between here and there, young lady?" he inquired, with a keen gaze.

"None, until you get within about ten miles of Boise," Denver Doll replied.

"Then, if you've no objections, I'll camp down here by your shanty and rest until daybreak, for I have ridden long an' far. Should you have any accommodations to offer in the way of refreshments, victuals, or a blanket, they will be thankfully received and paid for."

"You are welcome to what we have, though it ain't much," Doll responded, perceiving at once that he was a man of good breeding, even if he was poorly dressed. "Bill, you can cut the gentleman some bear steak and a piece of corn cake and get him a tin cupful of ale."

The traveler looked his gratitude at this, and, after dismounting and picketing his horse out to graze, he accepted a seat on a rustic bench near the cabin door.

"Yes, I've traveled long and far, and travel tells upon me as the years roll by. A snug and pleasant little home you appear to have here, young lady."

"Yes—we call it Little Bill's Bonanza, after my young partner. Not much of a bonanza, you know, but it just suited us for a name."

"May I inquire your name?"

"I reckon so. About the only name I've borne for years is Denver Doll. My companion here is Little Bill Bethel, and we generally camp down together. Your name is—"

"David Raymond. Out in the West I have gained the *nom de plume* of Old Prowler, from the fact that I am always prowling about. But I allow my days for prowling are about at an end. I'm getting old and crippled up, and begin to yearn for a quiet home where I can settle down and pass the remainder of my days in peace and rest."

His words, spoken in rather a remorseful tone, touched a sympathetic chord in Denver Doll's nature, and she felt drawn toward him more than she had ever felt toward any other stranger.

"Your life has not been altogether unruffled, I judge," she said, as she finished tying up a pouch of gold-dust.

"You speak aright, young lady. Although wealth has been the least of my wants, my life has not been without its bitter sweet. As a detective, I came to this country on a mission of importance, and I can never go back to England until that mission is fulfilled. Probably I shall live and die here."

"Indeed! never despair. There is no telling what a day may bring forth. Are you searching for some one?"

"Yes, dear. It is the old, old story—a rich lord has an only son whom he idolizes, but who is a wild scapegrace, and in early youth escapes to America, to be lost, probably, forever. The blow nearly distracts the father, and he disappears, with evidences left behind to show that he has committed suicide. Accordingly, the next of kin, an unprincipled young scoundrel, steps in and takes possession of the estates, with no one to oppose him. A detective, with a little of bad liking for him, forms a resolution to hunt up the lost heir and displace the usurper. That was I. I've made a strong attempt, but, alas! my success has not been wonderfully prolific. I am now in possession of no more knowledge than I had when I started."

"I am sorry to hear that," Doll returned. "America is a large place to canvass in search of one man, however. By the way, you had better tarry at our camp a few days and rest. In the mean time something may turn up."

"I believe I will accept your kind invitation, young lady, for your abode seems cheerful, as compared with some places I have encountered. And if I can be of any service to you as a hunter you can command me. I'm getting rather old and shaky, but I can still make a flying bird feel sick."

"Very well. You can take charge of keeping the larder supplied," Doll said. "It will give Bill and I more time to work our little private mining snap."

By this time Little Bill had appeared with a plate full of tempting edibles.

"Heer yer aire, grandpap!" he sung out, merrily. "Enuff fodder tew fatten a buzzard on. Tell ye, me an' Dollbaby lives high since we went in snucks together."

"Thank you, my little man, thank you! I shall not soon forget your kindness. This is the most tempting repast I have encountered for days."

"So? Well, neow, when a feller hain't had a square meal fer a couple o' weeks it do tickle his liver to ketch on to a snap like this. Know how it is myself, bet you! Bin so hungry already that I had to eat my own shoes fer beefsteak, but they were so tough that it took a hull day to get a squar' meal."

"There, Bill, that will do," Doll interrupted, reprovingly. "If you must tell a story, make it half-way reasonable."

"What's ther use, when truth is stranger than fiction?" William protested. "It don't cost no more fer a fire-cracker than it does for a squib!"

"That remains to be told, hereafter, Bill. Always aim to keep to the truth, and you will not have occasion to fire off even squibs."

By this time Old Prowler had dispatched the meal, and then lit his pipe.

"I s'pose you've never heard of a person named Joe Wilton, have you?" he said, after a few minutes of reflection. "It ain't a common name, yet you might have heard of it."

"I may possibly have heard of such a name, but cannot remember exactly."

"Humph! it's likely not. Did you ever meet a person named Jubal Andre?"

"Jubal Andre?" Doll exclaimed, thoughtfully. "It strikes me that the name sounds familiar. Let me see!"

She reflected for several minutes and then took a note-book from her pocket and consulted it.

"Ah, yes! I see. I have it here, in shape of a notice received from another detective. 'Jubal Andre, of Boise City, Idaho. Fix an eye on him and learn what kind of stuff he shoves.'"

"Ha! the very man, I'll wager!" Old Prowler muttered. "I must see him soon. He may be able to give me some information. So you are a detective, eh, as well as a miner?"

For answer Denver Doll exhibited her badge. Prowler nodded understandingly.

"I should estimate you as one well fitted for the calling," he said. "Later I may unfold more to you, but for the present let what I have told you suffice. Feeling tired, I believe I will turn in for the night."

But the appearance of a new comer upon the scene just then caused him to change his mind.

CHAPTER III.

SAL SLAP, AND A TRANSFORMATION.

WHEN first discovered, this new-comer was in the act of reining in a superannuated burro, near at hand, upon the back of which she was mounted.

Her approach had been so noiseless, that she had not been observed until she was within a few yards of the shanty door.

She was a tall, brawny, raw-boned woman, of evident great muscular strength and endurance, with a pinched, homely, vinegar-face, which told in its every lineament of a soured, ugly disposition.

The nose was fiery red, upon the end, and her mouth exposed only a pair of protruding teeth, disagreeable to behold. Her eyes were large and glaring, in their glance, and her gray hair was matted and unkempt.

A flaring red dress, poke bonnet and cowhide shoes, fixed her out in the way of wearing apparel, and she was armed with a dubious looking umbrella and formidable horse-pistol.

"Hello, thar!" she sung out, as she brought the sorrowful looking burro to a stand-still. "Whar's ther orstler of this 'owtel, sissy? Trot him out heer quicker'n scat, to take charge o' my Arabian!"

Whereupon she dismounted, and advanced, umbrella in hand.

"We don't employ an ostler, nor is this a hotel!" Denver Doll replied, not fancying the woman.

"What! no 'owtel—no ostler?" the new arrival screeched, angrily. "What kind uv a place is this, anyhow?"

"It's a lunertick 'sylum. Want ter jine?" piped out little Bill, from the doorway.

"Ye dratted imperdent snipe. I'll learn ye better manners than ter insult me!" screamed the termagant, making a leap for Bill, with the evident intention of giving him an initiatory mauling.

But, Denver Doll leaped quickly to her feet, and pushed her back.

"Not so fast, posy!" she said, calmly, but with sternness. "Don't be quite so fresh around here. Who are you, and what do you want?"

And Doll shoved a self-cocker in front of the strange woman's face.

"Who am I?—what do I want, you sassy minx? Oh! Jerimity! I've a mighty notion to snatch ye bald-headed fer yer imperdence. I'm old Sal Slap, I am, an' I'm a screamer, you bet! I'm ther ugliest critter that ever stood up fer woman's rights, an' kin lick ther best ten galoots that ever swallowed pizen. Every one's afeard o' me, fer I'm a terror from the word go. Used ter kept ther saloon up at Owl Forks, whar my reputation stands emblazon on ther annals o' hist'ry, as the first woman who ever survived six days in the town. Fight? Well, neow, if ye've got any stock around hyar, jest poke'm up ter tackle me."

"Luckily we have no fighting characters around this place, Mrs. Slap, and you'll have to seek other fields for the gratification of your pugilistic propensities," Doll retorted, grimly. "Thar's a town t'other side o' the mountains where you might work up something of a scare, but you can't do it here?"

"Oh! ho! ho! ho! I can't, hey!" the gentle girl from Owl Forks cried, evidently astonished. "So ye ain't afeard o' me?"

"Not in the least. It would take even a handsomer wild-cat than you to scare yours truly!"

"But I'm a screamer—a terror—a regular roarin' python, whose bite is pizen, and hug is ten times worse nor that uv a grizzly!"

"Can't help that!" Doll replied, calmly. "You can scream your head off, but it won't have any effect in this camp. About the prettiest thing you can do is to mount your Arabian and seek some more congenial climate."

"Whoopy! nary a time! I kin right down hyer to locate, and heer I'm goin' to squat!" she declared, with a flourish of her umbrella. "I'm goin' ter start an 'owtel w'at is a 'owtel, an' don't ye fergit it, nuther."

"You'll have to locate several hundred rods up or down the gulch then, for I own the bottom hereabouts, and have got the papers to show for it!" Doll retorted.

"Oh! ye hev, hev ye! Neow don't ye be quite so smart. I'm goin' ter build my shebang jest whar I please, an' hev got the jinglers to pay fer a site. Don't ask no odds uv anybody do Sal Slap, the screamer. See thet tree, over yander? That's where I'm goin' to erect the Guzzler's Glory!"

And with this declaration, Mrs. Slap seized the rein of her burro, and strode pompously away to the spot indicated.

Shortly afterward, she had a camp-fire started, and was seen bustling about preparing an evening meal.

Denver Doll watched her fitting figure, with a doubtful gaze.

"She seems to mean business!" she muttered. "What do you think of her, Prowler?"

"She beats my time!" the old man said, with a shake of the head. "She is evidently a hard customer to deal with!"

"And so she is. Her pedigree is not unknown to me. She used to keep a rum-hole up at Owl Forks, where the worst roughs in the West were wont to congregate, and fight, drink and gamble. The old woman is said to have committed more than one murder and robbery, and she spoke the truth, when she said that 'most every one was afraid of her. I don't like the idea of her locating here, but don't see how I am going to help myself."

"I propose we give her the bounce!" Little Bill put in. "Takes me to talk turkey to sech like her."

"She would scalp you at sight!" Doll laughed. "Bet she wouldn't! I'll buz her an' plague her 'til she'll git ravin'—then, if she tries any shennannigun, I'll wing her. Blamed ef she wasn't goin' to whale me wi' the 'bril!"

"About the only thing to do is to come to some terms with her, and let her remain, I should judge," Old Prowler remarked. "It might prove more profitable to your interests to keep on the right side of her."

On careful reflection, Doll came to the same conclusion.

She was a rough and unruly customer, and her enmity was not to be despised, for should she be forced to quit the claim, there could be little doubt but what she would return with sufficient backing to reinstate herself.

The next morning, while Doll was preparing breakfast, Sal Slap poked her head in at the door.

"Well?" she demanded. "goin' to sell me a buildin' lot over yonder?"

"On one condition!" Doll responded, surveying her sharply, "that is, that you will endeavor to protect my interests by not setting any one up to usurp my rights to the land in this portion of the gulch!"

"Agreed!" Sal replied. "I'm squar', ef I am a tough old screamer!"

"Then you can have sufficient building room for a thousand dollars!"

"Cheap enuff!" Sal declared, producing a sack of coin, and counting out gold pieces. "To save trouble, jest let me give you a piece o' advice. Go to work an' divide off your claim into small lots, an' sell 'em off as fast as ye can. Ye'll make more'n though ye try to hang onter the caboodle."

And so it proved.

The next day a party of speculators entered the gulch, and Doll disposed of ten lots for a thousand dollars each, and still had half a dozen left, beside the one occupied by their shanty.

This made her and Little Bill feel quite rich, and the latter took a trip to Boise City to bank their wealth.

In another week a great change had come over Little Bill's Bonanza. All of the lots had been sold off to advantage; the gulch swarmed with strangers; hundreds of teams were engaged in hauling logs, lumber and provisions; shanties, cabins and marquees were going up in every direction, while the bustle and excitement were unprecedented.

Old Sal Slap had imported a gang of ruffians, and her "Guzzler's Glory," was up and in full operation before the end of the first week after her arrival, the "grand opening" being celebrated by a free fight, during which two men were killed.

Anticipating the rush to the new "strike," Doll and Bill had added a large addition to their shanty, and opened it as the Bonanza Hotel.

Thus sprung up, like magic, the young city, and people flocked in from the adjacent mining regions to "make or break."

The same heterogeneous class that populates all mining excitements came to Bill's Bonanza, and within two weeks the camp was literally red hot, and reared its head aloft with due importance.

The gulch panned out well even beyond Denver Doll's claims, and the rock of the mountain sides was found to be impregnated profitably with both gold and silver.

This only added fuel to the fire of enthusiasm, and the excitement waged wild. Every stage—for they now ran daily—came in laden with humanity, and any sort of eating or sleeping place was at a premium.

One evening the stage brought in an extra load, and landed it in front of the Bonanza, which had already assumed its rank as the leading hotel—in prices, it may be added, as well as popularity.

Among the passengers was a man who must at once have attracted attention anywhere, for in appearance he bordered somewhat upon the extraordinary. He was fully six feet in height, and as well proportioned as he was tall; his figure nevertheless showing evidences of both strength, endurance, and the litness of great agility.

In face he was strikingly handsome, after a noble, manly way, his features being well molded and bronzed by exposure to the sun. His mouth, shaded by a dashing mustache, was firm yet pleasant in its habitual expression; his eyes were dark and piercing in their glance; his hair was of a dark brown color, and fell in a wave over his shoulders, half-way to the belt.

He also wore a narrow goatee, and in number of years looked to be about thirty-five, though he was possibly younger.

He was dressed in a half-frontier costume, consisting of corduroy breeches, thrust into a pair of handsome top-boots, and met at the waist by a white flannel shirt, open at the

throat. Besides the shirt, he wore a fancifully beaded and embroidered buckskin hunting-shirt and a jaunty sombrero.

His belt contained a pair of handsomely-mounted six-shooters and a hunting-knife, while in his hand he carried a Winchester rifle that was fully equal to his belt weapons, in point of finish.

Taken as a whole he was a handsome, dashing man, whom few could look upon but to admire, and whom none could pass without taking a second look at.

After leaving the stage he made his way into the office of the hotel, with the evident intention of securing accommodations.

Very likely he would have failed, but Denver Doll, in person, presided behind the counter, and her eyes had rested upon the sport from the moment he entered the door.

She was a critic of good looks, so far as they appertained to the masculine gender, and she at once pronounced the new arrival a very Adonis.

"Can I secure board and a private room here, miss?" he asked, as he approached the counter.

"I will see," Doll said, referring to the register. "We are full up to the roof every day since the excitement began. I have but one vacant room, and that has two beds in it."

"Well, if you can do no better, I suppose I shall have to take up with that, providing you don't put an objectionable party in with me."

"Very well. I will look out that you get at least a sober and honest room-mate. Terms are five dollars a day, sir."

"Take a week's board out of that, then," and throwing down a fifty-dollar bill, he proceeded to write his name.

Doll gave him his change, and then looked at the name.

"Big Buckskin, eh?" she said, in surprise. "Indeed, I feel honored to have you as a guest, and will see that you get the best the house affords!"

"You know me, then?" he interrogated.

"Yes—by reputation, as a bold and daring scout and detective. You may also have heard of Denver Doll."

"To be sure I have, and I am pleased to meet you. Thought I'd drop over this way to see if any devil ry needed a check, but if you are here I shall find but little to do."

"Be not sure of that; there is plenty for both to attend to. If you will wait a moment, I will call Billy, who will show you to your room."

She returned a moment later, accompanied by Little Bill, who showed the sport to the room assigned him.

As they went up-stairs, two men, who had been unobserved watchers from the veranda of the hotel, turned away and walked down the gulch, for street there was none, owing to the irregularity in the location of the houses.

These men were two of the Murdock brothers, Jack and Burk, both disguised with false beards.

"Yes, that was Big Buckskin," the captain said, "and we're in luck. Rather thought he couldn't keep away from this excitement. All we've got to do now is to pop him over at leisure."

"How are you going to work the job?" Jack Murdock demanded. "This out-and-out murder business is getting devilish distasteful to me!"

"Oh! you're gettin' too particular to live," the other growled. "Keep on your kickin', you will, 'til first ye know some one o' the boys will pop you over."

Jack laughed recklessly.

"I'll be cussed if they will!" he returned. "It takes a spry man to get a drop on me. Hang it, I allow there's a cause for me to growl. I haven't got a smell of a share of that thousand yet."

"Nor have the rest of the boys. I'm holding it back till I bleed old Andre once more. I'm goin' to do that, too, before I send Big Buckskin over the dam!"

"He won't unload!"

"The blazes he won't! Don't fool yourself on that score. There's a big stake up, as he admitted himself, and he ain't the man to lose a puddin' for the sake o' savin' the plums. By the great eternal!"

"What's the matter?"

Burk Murdock did not reply in words, but pointed across the gulch, where two men were standing, engaged in watching a party of miners busy opening up a new placer claim.

Jack Murdock whistled.

"Why, that's his reverend nibs, now!" he ejaculated. "But who's the swell along with him, that supports the side whiskers?"

"The English nabob what wants Andre's daughter, I presume," the captain said, with a shrug. "We're disguised. Let's go over there."

Accordingly they sauntered across the gulch, and paused but a few paces from where Sir Royal Rignold was standing with Jubal Andre.

Rignold was a haughty, aristocratic-looking individual of thirty years, with blonde side-whiskers, mustache, and hair, and was elaborately dressed in the finest of clothing, with jewels to match.

The claim which the miners were opening he had evidently purchased, for he was giving occasional directions.

The two Murdocks paid no attention to either Rignold or the wicked parson, but were seemingly eagerly interested in the work of the miners. Their ears were open, however, and not without hearing something.

"I guess the investment will pay back a small margin, at least," Sir Royal was saying. "I hope your daughter will arrive safely with the money to-night. I might as well have brought it myself, as we encountered no road-agents."

"It is better in her care," Andre responded, looking casually around him. "Road-robbers are less likely to search a woman for valuables than a man. The stage from Boise will reach here before ten o'clock to-night."

The conversation turned off on other topics then, and the two men soon sauntered off to a newly-finished shanty of more pretensions to a residence than the rest, and entered it.

And the two Murdocks also moved away.

"D'ye tumble?" the captain asked.

"Bet!" was Jack's response. "Andre's gal is comin' in on the stage to-nig't, an' is fetchin' the swell's swag, 'cause he was afeard to fetch it himself."

"We want a smell at that. They say as how there's no agents fer the Boise trail, but I opine we kin show 'em better. Where's the boys?"

"Up at old Sal Slap's."

"What! She's not here, the old tigress?"

"Of course! The boys nosed her out first. Got a bang-up ranch, called Guzzler's Glory. Good haven for us, too. She had it built wif an eye to biz, in the way o' supplyin' a hidin'-place—secret room, ye know."

"Humph! we may need to use it. But to business. Go tell the boys to collect on the Boise trail, a mile out, as soon as it's dark! D'ye take?"

"In course!"

"Call 'Cuckoo'!"

The brothers separated, and went in different directions, to mature preparations for the stage robbery.

CHAPTER IV.

A MOMENTOUS NIGHT.

AFTER being shown to his room, Big Buckskin dismissed Little Bill before that youngster could get a word in edgewise.

"Never mind, old boss," William pompously muttered, as he went down-stairs in a state of considerable chagrin. "I'll get even wif you yet. Needn't feel so mighty big ef you aire six foot. Reckon you look down on kids as kinder a superfluous adjunct, as Doll says; but 'twixt you an' me I've hearn tell o' kids wif a fat bank account. Wait till you want some information—oh, won't I freeze ye wif the furst answer! Bet I wull! Jest like Dollbaby to go git sweet on that giant, too. I'll put a flea in her ear furst time I get a chance."

The Bonanza had a bar-room and a well-stocked bar, but no games of any kind, except dice, were allowed therein.

Little Bill usually officiated during the day as dispenser of good cheer, while Old Prowler took his place after sunset, when trade was more brisk.

That position the venerable detective occupied when Bill entered the saloon, after conducting Big Buckskin to his room.

The room being vacant for the moment, Old Prowler signaled for Bill, who approached with a decidedly grum face.

"What's the matter, Billy?" the Englishman asked, seeing that something bad g ne wrong.

"Nothin'," the boy answered. "Big lummox trod on my corn. W'ot ye want?"

"Who was that fellow whom you showed up-stairs?"

"Big Buckskin."

"Big Buckskin?"

"Didn't I say so? Want me to write it down fer ye? Injun-fighter—bad medicine—card sharp—cuss in general. Killed sixty reds, single-handed, in one day, up on the Yellerstone."

"Bill, you are an inveterate liar!"

"Git out! 'Twer' red-birds he killed."

And with a triumphant whistle, the "proprietor" of the Bonanza swaggered out of the "office" for a walk around town, leaving Old Prowler to deliberate over the situation.

In the mean time Big Buckskin had locked his door and thrown himself upon the apology of a bed with a yawn, for a long ride in the lumbering stage coach had wearied him.

He soon dropped off into a refreshing sleep, and did not awaken until the supper gong sounded, when he made a hasty toilet and went down-stairs.

To his satisfaction he was given a table apart from the rest of the guests, at which he was later joined by Denver Doll, whose fair cheeks were prettily flushed, and who looked very attractive in her habitual neat costume of male attire.

"This privacy I deem an exceptional honor, fair hostess," the sport remarked, graciously, "not to mention your own company, which I am proud to have. I believe I should have felt decidedly awkward at the other tables, but now I feel so reassured that I can eat as much as a starved grizzly."

"Perhaps I have made an unprofitable move, then, considering the high price of provender," Doll laughed, jokingly. "Do you contemplate remaining here long, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Call me simply Buckskin," he added. "Yes, I propose to lie around loose until I can get on the sure trail of the notorious Murdock Brothers. I have sworn to break up the gang, and rather expect the excitement will attract them here."

"I can perhaps be of service to you, then. I am of the opinion that they are in camp now."

Big Buckskin stared.

"Do you know them?" he demanded.

"Not all," Doll replied; "but to-night when you were registering I observed two rough-looking fellows staring in at you through the open door, and saw them exchange what appeared to be significant glances. After you went up-stairs they left. Both wore reddish beards, which I at the time concluded were false!"

Big Buckskin whistled.

"I doubt not but what you are right," he said. "The Murdocks are as much my sworn enemies as I am theirs. That they are here ahead of me, however, is something of a surprise. They no doubt calculated as regards the excitement in the same way I did. I will look around this evening."

"Are you not afraid of a shot in the dark?"

"No. I have been shot at more times than I am years old. They can plug away at my form as much as they like, as long as they don't get above the top of my shoulders."

"Ah! then you wear some protective arrangement beneath your clothing?"

"Yes, a suit of the finest and strongest mail—a present from an old Russian officer whom I chanced to meet a few years ago."

"Well, I wish you success. If you need any assistance call on me."

"I will, for I have heard much of your daring and could not ask for a greater defender. Are you alone here?"

"Oh, yes, except for my youthful apprentice, Billy. The boy is quite as good as any detective; in many respects better than a man."

After supper the sport bade her good-evening, and lighting a cigar which he purchased of Old Prowler at the bar, he sauntered out to see the sights of Little Bill's Bonanza by lamp-light, if such were there.

And there were.

Several dance-houses and gaming-houses had already opened up, but they possessed no attractions for the sport, who merely glanced in.

Sal Slap's "Guzzler's Glory," however, caught his attention, and out of curiosity he entered.

The long saloon was filled with the worst characters of the male persuasion that had flocked to the camp—men whose wretched lives were photographed in their faces, and whose evil expressions were a mirror's reflection of their hearts.

The center of attraction, however, was a giant who occupied the center of the floor and was engaged in a noisy breakdown to the music of a wheezy accordeon.

Big Buckskin was manifestly a large man as compared with the ordinary run of human beings, but even he paled into insignificance as compared with the typical bullwhacker, who, while he danced, roared like a lion in its native jungle.

"Heer am I—old Gulliver, right up from Lilliput—the same old nubbin' o' corn what et tuk hull armies to capture. It's me, an' no dispute, and I'm down here on purpose to get my old sheet-iron copper-lined b'iler full o' bug-juice. Goin' to treat, bubby?"

He addressed his remark to Big Buckskin, on whom his eyes had instantly become fixed.

Buckskin did not reply, but turned his gaze away, for, although by no means afraid of any man he had ever met, he had no desire to enter into a quarrel, nor did he desire to humor a man whose every lineament betrayed the human beast in glowing colors.

But Gulliver from Lilliput, as he styled himself, did not propose to let him off, evidently, for he swaggered up with a show of braggadocio and glared at Big Buckskin with a leer.

"Did ye heer me articulate a minnit ago?" he growled, fiercely. "Did ye heer me ax ye war ye goin' to treat?"

"I believe I heard you!" Big Buckskin replied, calmly.

"Oh! ye did, did ye? Waal, what ye goin' to do?"

"Nothing at all."

"Oh! ye're stingy, aire ye? Waal, I ain't. I'm old Gulliver from Lilliput, I am; so come up and drink wi' me."

"Thank you, but I do not care for anything!"

"But I say yes!" the giant roared.

"And I say no!" Buckskin replied, coolly and firmly.

"Then, durn ye, you've got to fight. Any galoot as won't wet his whistle wi' Gulliver has got to fight!"

This declaration very naturally elicited a murmur of applause from the rough audience congregated within Sal Slap's saloon.

To their crime-hardened natures nothing was of greater pleasure than a bloodthirsty battle between two human beings, for mastery.

Such fights between ordinary men were of nightly occurrence in the den; but a struggle between two men like Big Buckskin and Gulliver promised to be of more than usual interest.

Huge and ponderous was the giant, but many a discerning eye in the room saw qualities in the nervy figure of the handsome sport that were wanting in the cumbrous giant.

Big Buckskin received the declaration of his huge confronter with as much coolness as he had manifested in answering his questions, not a change of expression in his face denoting any alarm on his part.

"Did ye heer me?" Gulliver roared again. "Ef ye won't drink you've got to fight, you little pigmy."

"Then, fight it is," Big Buckskin replied, coolly. "Take my advice, man, and mind your own business, or, ten chances to one, you'll get hurt!"

The giant paused a moment, in a half-squatting position, and glared in a puzzled way at the sport. Then he burst into such a guffaw as made the house fairly tremble.

"You hurt me, the unconquerable, famous Gulliver from Lilliput!—you, sech a leetle suckling babe! Why, pilgrim, I'll fight you single-handed. I want ye ter try to lick me. I want yer to knock some o' the conceit out o' me!"

"That's easy enough done!" Buckskin replied; and before any one had any idea of his intention, he slapped Gulliver across the mouth with the flat of his hand.

The blow was delivered with startling quickness and terrible force, the report being audible in any portion of the room.

So sudden was it that it took the Goliath by surprise, and upsetting his equilibrium caused him to roll to the floor.

For a moment he lay panting for breath—then, sitting up, looked at Big Buckskin with a broad grin.

"Dog my cats, if ye didn't do thet up brown, pilgrim!" he said, hoarsely. "Done me more good than a cactus thorn in a glass o' bad habit. Tell ye what I'll do—bet ye can't hit me again."

"I have no desire to do so, as long as you behave yourself," Buckskin replied, sternly. "If you bother me again, however, I shall endeavor to knock your teeth down your throat. So look to yourself."

Saying which he walked across the room to the bar, and purchased a fresh cigar and lit it.

As he did so Gulliver raised himself from the floor and shook himself like some great shaggy dog.

"See here, pardner," he said, once more swaggering up to the sport, "you an' I ain't thru' yet. I allow I ain't got nothin' ag'in' you, nobow, but, all the same, you've insulted me, an' I want ye to polergize like a man."

"I am not aware that I owe you any apology whatever!" Big Buckskin retorted. "You wanted the conceit taken out of you, and I endeavored to accommodate you; but I see that you have a plenty left."

"Bet I have, pilgrim! I'm a roarin' rhinoseros, I am—a reg'lar terror uv the desert, wi' no one to dispute that I'm the king of beasts. I axed ye to drink, an' ye slapped me in the mouth for my pains. Jumpin' Jupiter, thet aire riled me, stranger, an' I want satisfaction. Wull ye be a gentleman, an' step inter a ring wi' me?"

"If you demand redress you shall have an opportunity to get it."

"Waal, I do."

"Then it is settled. How shall it be? Are we to be quits hereafter, or shall I be compelled to do the job for you now?"

"Ef ye kin knock me out o' time, pilgrim, dog my cats ef we won't shake hands over it and sw'ar friendship and good will toward one another forever!" the giant declared, with a flourish.

"Then, gentlemen, will some of you kindly chalk out a ring?" Buckskin asked, calmly.

"Mr. Gulliver, get ready!"

The ring was quickly made ready for the contest.

The giant then began his preparations, watched with interest by the crowd. He first went to the bar and took a tremendous horn of whisky, evidently as a "bracer," to nerve him up for what he knew must come, then he divested himself of all his garments except his trousers, and thus stepped into the ring.

Big Buckskin had stood leaning against the bar, idly watching his opponent's preparations, but his eye kindled with admiration as he beheld the massive muscular figure of the border Briareus.

"Come!" that worthy roared, glaring at the sport with self-conscious pride; "ye ain't a-goin' to weaken, are you?"

"If I do, it is for the first time in my career," Buckskin replied, relighting his cigar, tipping his hat back upon his head, and stepping forward.

"Why in thunder don't ye hurry up and get ready then?" Gulliver demanded; "I'm anxious to git at ye!"

"I am ready. Step into the ring, and square yourself!"

The giant looked his surprise!

"What? Ain't ye goin' ter strip?" he asked, seeming to feel a little uneasy.

"There is no need of that!" Buckskin declared. "I can hit just as hard a blow with my duds on as off."

Gulliver shut one eye, and reviewed his opponent speculatively.

"See hyar!" he cried, "you wull ex-keuse me, but I believe you're a perfesh!"

"You are wrong. There is nothing I detest more thoroughly than fighting."

"Yas, mebbe; but, 'twixt us Lilliputians, you don't often git left. Now, before we begin this hyer funeral, I want to make one partin' request."

"And what is that?"

"Don't peg me on the smeller. Hit me anywhere's else, but for Heving's sake don't dislocate my proboscis so I can't tell good likker from bad when I smell of it."

"You must look out for your own horn, my friend!" Buckskin replied. "If I get a chance at it, I shall endeavor to make it look the color of the barkeeper's!"

And he nodded toward Sal Slap, who was an interested spectator.

"Oh! you insultin' loafer, wait till I catch you alone!" she screamed, getting red in the face. "I'll larn ye how to cast insinuations on an innercent woman's beauty!"

Gulliver had good cause to be sensitive in regard to his nasal appendage, for a huge seed-wart grew upon the end of it, and made it very tender.

"Come! I'm ready!" Buckskin called out. "One! two! three!"

At the word the two men came to time in the ring, and began a series of feinting experiments, for the purpose of testing each other's science.

Although big and clumsy, Gulliver was evidently not an amateur at the manly art, and soon succeeded in getting in a light blow upon the sport's left cheek.

That was nothing, however. The next instant Buckskin's fist shot against the giant's left optic with terrible velocity, and followed with a companion blow against his nose.

To say that Gulliver dropped, would be expressing it mildly. He went down, literally, "like a thousand of brick," and lay stretched

out at full length, groaning and pressing one hand upon the nasal organ, while his eye assumed a discolored appearance.

"That's enuff!" he howled. "I ain't a bed-bug—I've got one taste, and that's enuff!"

A cheer rung out through the room.

At the same instant there came the report of a pistol, and a bullet whizzed unpleasantly close to Big Buckskin's head.

Looking quickly around, he beheld a young Indian in the act of skulking from the saloon.

With a leap that would have astonished many a professional, he reached the door just in time to seize the red-skin by his scalp-lock, and jerk him back into the room!

Planting his foot on the would-be assassin's breast, he drew a revolver, and cocked it.

"So you thought you were going to get off easy, you infernal cutthroat?" he cried, a wild gleam in his eyes. "You should have known better than to attempt the life of Big Buckskin!"

He then turned to the crowd that flocked around.

"Gentlemen, can any of you inform me who this red heathen is?"

"That's Red Eagle, from Boise!" a miner said. "He's a sneak-thief and rascal, and you can't do better than finish him!"

A sudden thought came into the Sport's mind just then, for he thrust the muzzle of his revolver against the Indian's temple, a fierce glow in his black eyes.

"See here, red-skin!" he hissed, "your life depends upon your truthful answers to my questions. If I detect you in the suspicion of a lie, I'll blow your brains out where you lay. Do you hear me, you red rascal?"

The savage bobbed his head, in the affirmative.

"Then, see that you answer me truthfully. Who put you up to shoot me?"

"Nobody!"

"Take care! Are you lying?"

"Red Eagle nebbber lie!"

"What did you shoot at me for, then?"

"No like pale-face. Kill many Red Eagle's people!"

"Get out! That's no excuse. Do you know the Murdocks?"

The red skin started.

"Hear of 'em?" he replied.

"Do you know them?" the sport repeated, fiercely.

"Ugh! some!"

"I thought so. They set you on. Where are they, now?"

"Dunno!"

"Look out!"

"Red Eagle think um in mountains."

"Where's their ranch?"

"Dunno! nebbber there!"

"They want my life don't they?"

"Tink so!"

"And you allowed by killing me, you could get paid for it?"

"Ugh!"

Big Buckskin put his revolver in his belt, and jerked the savage to his feet, by his scalp-lock.

"Now, you red devil, I'll give you ten minutes to leave the camp. If I catch you here again, I'll shoot you!"

The Indian was in no wise loth to obey, and made his exit from the shanty, in a manner more hasty than graceful.

Having seen sufficient of Guzzler's Glory for one night, Big Buckskin soon after left the place, and returned to his room at the hotel.

"The Murdocks are after me in earnest, now!" he muttered, "but they'll find me as wide awake as ever. Once I get them broken up, I will bid adieu to this wild country, and return to the home that knew me in my early boyhood. Yet, I can hardly bear to go knowing that I have an only son buffeting somewhere about this world, perhaps without a home or friends. Something tells me, too, that I am going to see Agnes. God forbid, for very likely she has forgotten me, in all these years we have been separated."

He lay for some time upon his bed, but a feeling of restlessness had possession of him and sleep failed to come to his eyes. The room seemed to be close, and it was with difficulty he could get his breath.

Finally, in a spirit of desperation, he arose, and went down-stairs, where he procured a glass of wine, at the bar.

Old Prowler eyed him, with a strange expression, while he drank.

"Excuse me," he said as the sport set down his glass, upon the counter, "but you are called Big Buckskin, are you not?"

"I opine that's about the ticket, my friend," Buckskin replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Merely out of curiosity. In your features I perceive some resemblance to a person I once knew. Strange, ain't it, how memory will carry faces back into the past?"

"True for you!" Buckskin returned. "I often see a face that reminds me of some friend in days gone-by."

"You have another name?"

"Well, yes; but I don't have much occasion to use it. Big Buckskin is more popular out in this country than plain Joe Wilton; so I hang to the first."

"I see. You must have had an eventful life. Sometime, when you have nothing to do, I should like you to give me a brief sketch of it."

"Thank you. Some day when I have the blues I may be able to accommodate you."

Just then the stage from Boise City dashed up to the door, and the stentorian voice of old Hank Hill yelled:

"Little Bill's Bonanza! File out!"

Big Buckskin sauntered out upon the veranda to look at the new arrivals, and was there joined by Denver Doll.

"No accommodation here for this crowd," she said, laughingly, as the passengers left the stage. "Ah! what's that—a stage robbery?"

The word "road-agents" was passing from mouth to mouth as the passengers alighted.

"What is it, Hank?" Doll asked, as the driver approached her.

"Oh! nuthin' much!" the veteran grunted. "A gang o' agents halted us a mile out, and cleaned out the wealth. Not much loss, 'cept the gal yonder, who got cleaned out of a heap of paper money."

The eyes of Denver Doll and Big Buckskin turned toward the coach, and the Jehu passed on.

A woman, young and beautiful, and well dressed, had just alighted, and was gazing about her excitedly, evidently expecting some one.

The bronzed face of Big Buckskin turned pale, and he stepped from the veranda to her side.

"Agnes!" he said, in a low tone.

She turned with a gasping cry, and gave him a startled look.

At the same time a man sprung forward, pushed Buckskin back, and clasped his arm about the lady's waist.

"Avast! you ruffian!" he cried addressing the Buckskin Sport. "How dare you insult an unprotected lady?"

For an instant the sport did not answer; he was white and speechless with rage; the next instant he sprung forward, and tearing the man—who was Sir Royal Rignold—from the lady's side, he raised him high above his head, by the power of his mighty arms, and for an instant held him there in a horizontal position, crying in tones clear and stern:

"Curses on you, Royal Rignold. I'll show you what authority I have to address that woman!"

The next instant he hurled the Englishman in a heap to the ground.

At the same time Jubal Andre appeared upon the scene, and comprehending the situation, hurried his daughter away to the shanty.

Leaving the victim of his anger lying in a stunned condition upon the ground, Big Buckskin turned to the crowd.

"Gentlemen!" he said, quietly; "if that puppy calls for satisfaction, some one of you please bring the intelligence. I shall be most happy to accommodate him."

Still white with passion, he turned and entered the hotel.

Denver Doll followed him, and caught his coat-sleeve just as he was about to ascend the stairs.

"Hold up!" she said, her gaze meeting his. "I want you to answer me one question?"

"Well?"

"Who was that woman?"

He laughed bitterly.

"A stone—a viper, and best of all, a woman who will never interfere with my great respect and admiration for you!"

Then he went up-stairs.

CHAPTER V.

THE DESERTED GIRL-WIFE.

No incident worthy of detail happened during the remainder of that night, except at the Bonanza Hotel.

The bruised Sir Rignold had been picked up and conveyed to Jubal Andre's shanty by a party of sympathizing miners, and the remainder of the evening was spent in discussing the two main topics—namely: the stage robbery

and the strange proceedings in front of Bonanza.

As for Denver Doll, she moved about her prosperous establishment, superintending things with her habitual pleasant demeanor; but an intimate acquaintance might have noticed that there was a more vivid flush upon her cheeks to-night than usual, and that she was somewhat less vivacious.

She waited expectantly for a messenger from Sir Royal Rignold very naturally, surmising that he would send a challenge to Big Buckskin; but in this she was agreeably disappointed, for no challenge put in an appearance.

Toward midnight, when she was about to close up for the night, a ragged, haggard woman, barefooted and bleeding from brier scratches, and carrying a six-months' old babe in her arms, entered the bar-room, of which the Detective Queen was the sole occupant.

In years the new-comer had evidently not passed far into her teens; but the attenuation of her figure, haggardness of her face, and wildly wearied expression of her eyes, told better than words that she had undergone long and exquisite suffering.

She approached the bar, behind which Denver Doll was standing, with a faltering step, as if she was afraid of being repulsed.

Denver Doll, despite her own young life, had seen much of the sinfulness and suffering of the world, and withal had as tender a heart as ever beat within the breast of woman.

Quick and discerning, intense and critical to a fault, she was last of all persons to turn from a fellow-creature because that one had fallen into the painful clutches of poverty and misfortune.

It was no wonder, then, that her heart went out for the pitiful-looking girl-mother, with her suckling babe.

"Please ma'am, would yez be so kind to give me a drink of wather, and if yez have a bit of supper yez could give me for the like av that, shure the Virgin Mary and the saints will bless yez!"

And she laid a locket and chain upon the bar, with a wistful glance.

Denver Doll took it up, and examined it, with curiosity.

"Where did you get this?" she asked.

"Shure, lady, I didn't stale it," the woman replied, with a half sob. "It was the gift at me weddint, from me husband what has gone far away and left me."

The locket was a costly affair, of heavy gold set, with real diamonds and pearls.

On opening it Doll could scarcely conceal her surprise. On one side was the picture of a fair young girl—evidently that of the poor homeless creature who now waited without the bar. The reverse picture was the face of a man, and it was that which surprised Doll, for she had seen it before.

"Have you any idea of the value of this locket, lady?" Doll asked.

"Shure! I have not!" was the reply. "It's little I know about jewelry at all."

"Well, I should say so. To say the least, the chain and locket are worth two hundred dollars!"

The woman uttered a surprised cry, but her face clouded, when Doll handed it back to her.

"Won't yez take it?" she asked.

"By no means. Take it and never part with it. You can have your supper free. Wait a moment."

She went into a rear apartment a moment, but soon returned.

"Let me have the baby, and come with me to my room," she said. "You can eat there. You must be tired I know; and, besides, I've some clothing to give you."

The Irish girl uttered a prayer for all the saints to preserve her benefactress, and meekly surrendered her babe and followed.

Once up in Denver Doll's room, a transformation was inaugurated, and Nellie Kelly, as she gave her name, was soon comfortably clad in full suit of female attire of serviceable goods, which Doll had long since discarded for her masculine dress.

The astonishment and gratitude of the poor girl would be hard to describe; and her own language was certainly inadequate to express it.

Next came the supper, served by one of the Detective Queen's Chinese servants; and after it was all over, Nellie knelt at the feet of Denver Doll, and sobbed out her heartfelt thanks.

"God bless yez!" she said, in conclusion. "You are the kindest wan I've met in many a long day."

"Do not feel bad, but cheery and good, like myself. I've had some tough trials in my time, which none but myself and God knows of; but I locked 'em up in my heart, with a resolve to face the cold world with a brave front. We may be bitterly wronged, dear, but if we do right as our conscience directs us, we've the satisfaction of knowing that we'll scoop in the winning deal over our enemies, at the end of the game—but maybe you don't understand our vernacular phrases. Nevertheless, I want you to tell me of your past—why you are here—everything!"

Nellie looked up into her face, wonderingly.

"Phat yez want to know for?" she asked.

"Because you have caused me to be interested in you. Why are you here, alone and in destitute circumstances, so far from your native country?"

"Shure, it's searchin' for me husband, I am."

"Your husband, eh? Is he here, in the West, my dear?"

"Faith, ma'am, but he is. He thought he could dodge simple Nellie; but, bless the good Saints, I was sharper than he thought."

"He ran away and left you, then?"

"He did, but I had a bit of money saved up, an' I followed in the next ship!"

"Good for you! Where do you expect to find your husband?"

"Shure, the last place he wint was to Bias City, I think."

"Boise City, you mean."

"That's it. I run out av money at Freer's Ford, and had to foot it."

"And, Nellie, why is it you pursue this man, who is so unfaithful?"

"The devil only knows, mum, only I want to git the likes of a glance at him, once more, and prevint him from foolin' any other girl."

"Good! I'll help you."

"Phat?"

"I'll help you. If you will promise me to remain in my care, and obey my advice, I'll make you the happier by making your husband unhappy. I'll also compel your husband to provide for your future."

"Yez'll do this?"

"Yes. But you must promise to stay in this room, closely, and do as I instruct you. I think I can work up a good case here, that will please more than one."

"May the saints preserve you! I will do everything phat you say."

"Very well. You can occupy this room with me, and I will see that you are rightly cared for. Will you loan me the locket, to work on?"

"Shure I will. But yez don't know me husband's name?"

"Yes, I do. It is Royal Rignold!"

"The saints save us, but how did yez learn the likes of that?"

"Oh! I saw him twice to night—once in life, and once in the locket."

"Och! he's not here?"

"Yes—but, you must stay right here, until I get ready to use you against him."

"I will do as plazes yez. Yez have been good to me."

"It's a bargain, then. I will now go down and close up for the night!"

She descended to the office, where she found waiting no less a personage than the redoubtable Gulliver from Lilliput, whom Big Buckskin had met at Sal Slap's "Guzzler's Glory."

CHAPTER VI.

A GLIMPSE OF THE GAME.

It was the first time Denver Doll had ever seen the giant, and she stared at him for a moment, with amazed incredulity.

Gulliver smiled his sweetest smile, courtesied, and scraped his foot in true Chesterfield style, and then spake:

"Beloved maiden, beholdest thou me?"

"Well, I should snicker!" Doll replied, with a low laugh. "Any one that couldn't discover such a fly-speck as you, ought to be imprisoned in an eye and ear infirmary. You take the rag off'n the bush!"

"No, beautiful sissy, I never war guilty of theft, 'cept once in my bloomin' youth, when I stole the luv from the buzzom o' the belle of Chicago. I war purty, then; but alas! leaves fade, when autumn tickles 'em, an' flowerets fade, when frost nips 'em. Dy'e see this nose, sissy?"

"Yes!"

"An' this discolored organ of sight?"

"You bet!"

"Waal, but a few hours ago, both were fair to view, but the blighting hand of a son-of-a-sea-cook fell upon them, in two fell swoops, and left the indelible results you behold. Don't you

think such a person orter be lynched fer such an outrageous assault on a poor, homeless orphan?"

"To be sure he ought," Doll replied greatly amused, and wondering how she was to get rid of the overgrown ruffian.

"That's what I think!" Gulliver went on. "And yet, here you keep that same galoot under yer roof, the same as if he was a prince!"

"I don't know who ye mean!"

"Ye don't! Don't know nothin' about a chap called Big Buckskin?"

"Oh! do you mean him?"

"Bet I do! He's the chap what did the business for me. Jerusalem Jericho! didn't he polish me, though?"

"Glad of it!" Denver Doll declared. "Big Buckskin is my mash, you know!" with a laugh.

"Lord help you! ef he mashes you in the same style he did me; you won't be so purty as you aire now."

"But he won't. And now, if your interview is concluded, I will close up shop."

"But it ain't. I want to see that aire fellow that slugged me in the eye and mashed the corn on my nose!"

"You can't see him!"

"But I will see him!"

"But I say you shall not!"

The giant stared at her for a moment, as if doubtful whether she meant it or not; then, turning, he strode toward the door, on reaching which he turned and tipped his hat, with comical suavity.

"Ta, ta! daisy—I go, as went forth the toads from Ireland. As Grandad Gulliver said to the Lilliputians, I cannot comprehend the strangeness of these people."

And in a moment more he had vanished from view.

Quite satisfied with the number of incidents of the day, Doll closed up the Bonanza and retired for the night.

With the dawning of the next day, the topic of the stage robbery was revived, and generally discussed. A number of the principal claim owners held a meeting to adopt some measures for breaking up the gang of desperadoes, at the start.

After due consultation it was decided that no better plan could be adopted than to organize a Vigilance Committee, and put a solid man to the front.

"Among those whom I judge most competent to take command," one miner said, "is the noted outlaw hunter, Big Buckskin!"

"A good choice!" affirmed another.

"But I object!" put in Jubal Andre, who had managed to work himself into the conference.

"That fellow is a rascal, and has a notoriety second to none for wickedness."

"Have you any personal interest, sir," a miner asked, "in this appointment?"

"No," was the answer, "but my prospective son-in-law may have."

"We are not considering prospective son-in-laws, nor personal spites," the miner said.

"We will take a vote on the matter, among ourselves, who are most interested, and if the result is in favor of the scout, we will give him the charge."

With a suppressed growl, Jubal Andre separated himself from the caucus, realizing that that was no time for his protest.

A vote was taken, and it was unanimously agreed that Big Buckskin should be waited upon, and asked to take the chieftaincy of the Vigilantes at Little Bill's Bonanza.

In the mean time Jubal Andre returned to his shanty, and found Agnes and Sir Royal playing chess in the front room. The latter was white and nervous, and had his left arm in a sling and his head bandaged.

"Well! did you find out who the puppy was who assaulted me, Parson Andre?" he asked, grimly.

"I did," the other replied, with a glance at Agnes, which was full of significance.

"He is a border ruffian of the boldest type, and is known as Big Buckskin."

"Humph! I have resolved to challenge the fellow to fight me with swords. I am an expert at fencing, and am satisfied that I could run him through. But do you know, friend Andre, that there is one thing which puzzles me?"

"Eh? Something that puzzles you? What is it, pray?"

"Why, you see, it seems so deuced strange that the fellow should call my darling Agnes by her name and then, likewise, call me by my name!"

"That I can easily explain, Sir Royal. This

man, it seems, has been in co-operation with another rascal, who awhile ago attempted to blackmail me, with a view of extorting money. They had a confederate in my house in the person of a servant, whom I afterward discharged. It seems their game is young yet. They evidently propose to make money out of me at all hazards, and their knowledge of some of my family affairs probably caused the trouble last night. I would advise you to let the matter drop, for your life is too valuable to be placed at the mercy of one of these ruthless border ruffians."

"Oh! dear Sir Royal, please don't think of running the risk of your life," Agnes cried imploringly. "Life would be a blank to me if you were taken off."

"Then rest your heart, my betrothed, for I will submit to your judgment!" the Englishman averred.

Later, when Sir Royal had retired to his room, Jubal Andre still sat in the parlor, in company with his fair but false daughter.

"It is he, then?" she was saying, her eyes bent upon the carpet.

"Yes, and we have got to play our cards cleverly, or he will be of great damage to us. Did you count Sir Royal's money before you were robbed?"

"Yes. There were ten thousand dol—"

"Which, all told, was worth perhaps twenty-five cents."

"How do you mean?"

"I made an exchange a few nights ago—poor for good, you know."

"Ah! then—"

"We are ten thousand in, whether you capture him or not."

"I think I can depend on him, if Joe Wilton does not spoil the thing."

"He must not. The Murdocks are here now, I suspect, and I'll hurry them up as soon as I can safely see them. Once Joe Wilton is out of the way, you can safely marry Sir Royal and we will all make a start for England, and Castle Chelton, where years ago I served as bailiff to Sir Hugh Chelton. Strange what ever became of Sir Hugh, and that young scapegrace, Sir Clifford. It was a lucky thing anyhow for Sir Royal, and, as it promises to turn out, a lucky thing for ourselves."

"Ah! yes; I suppose so. I wish I knew the fate of my child, however."

"Bah! forget that you ever had one, or a husband. Remember that future wealth and happiness now all depend upon you."

CHAPTER VII.

ANDRE BEGINS TO DOUBT, AND BUCKSKIN BEGINS TO ACT.

DURING the night of Nellie Kelly's arrival Denver Doll slept but little, for her mind was too busy in thought for sleep.

When morning dawned she arose to find that Little Bill and Old Prowler had already opened up for business.

Sending the former on an errand, the Detective Queen approached the bar, and looking upon it thoughtfully, said:

"Prowler, you say you are an English detective, and, consequently, ought to know every important personage upon that patch of land governed by the queen. Did you ever hear of a man named Sir Royal Rignold?"

"Yes; I once knew a Royal Rignold; but he had no Sir prefixed to his name. This he probably acquired from inheritance."

"Tell me about it, Prowler."

"Why do you want to know?"

"For your own good. You told me you were anxious to find the lost son of a great estate. Perhaps I can be of a deal of assistance to you."

"Think you so? Then I will enlighten you a little, though I do not care to throw the whole business into your hands. The estate of Chelton Castle belonged to Sir Hugh Chelton up to the time of his strange disappearance. After him, it should have descended to Sir Clifford, his runaway son; but, he being absent and dead to the world, it fell to the next of kin, his cousin, Royal Rignold. May I ask what you know about the case, more than what I have told you?"

"Very little. I have gathered in some points, however, and were you to put the matter entirely in my hands, I believe I could make a success out of it."

"I fear not. Were Sir Clifford found, even, after so many years, it would be hard to reinstate him, since Sir Hugh is dead, and he would have difficulty in proving his identity."

"Did he not have some birth-mark, or some family relic in his possession at the time of leaving home?"

"He had the royal arms pricked in his arm in two colored inks, when a boy. It may not have worn away, if he still be living."

"Likely not. Through the agency of certain facts that have come into my possession, I believe I can not only soon find the lost heir, but prove the usurper a rogue and a rascal. Give me sole charge of the case, and I will cipher it out."

"Well, if you think you can do it, go ahead—I'm willing, Sir Clifford back again in his rightful position, I can afford to pay you well for your work."

"I am not so particular about the pay. It is more for the purpose of righting a great wrong that I crave the job, than for any other reason, I assure you. You spoke once about Jubal Andre. Has he any connection with the case?"

"Not directly. He was once the bailiff of old Sir Hugh—years ago. He, however, stole ten thousand pounds in gold from Sir Hugh, and fled to this country, where he is living still, according to all accounts."

"Yes; he is even here in the gulch, I have learned, in company with his daughter and Sir Royal Rignold."

"How know you this?"

"No matter; I have learned so."

"Then you may be sure there is some devilry brewing."

"I believe it is the intention of Sir Royal to wed Andre's daughter."

"That must never be! No Andre shall ever queen it at Castle Chelton while I can prevent it! I think too much of old Sir Hugh to allow that!"

"Sir Royal cannot legally wed again," Denver Doll said quietly. "He has one wife living already, as I can prove. But leave it to me; I'll make a grand *denouement*, ere long, that will surprise several persons at least."

She then turned away, and Old Prowler watched her curiously until she had disappeared within the office.

"A queer girl, but mighty shrewd!" he said to himself; "and I shall not be surprised if she works the case better than I could do it myself. Would to Heaven Sir Clifford could meet and win this queenly American girl, to take back as his bride to Castle Chelton!"

Jubal Andre, although he had, while in Boise City, endeavored to cloak his sins under the mantle of pretension of being a minister of the Gospel, was at heart an arrant rascal of the first water, with a power for scheming rarely if ever surpassed.

After the termination of his interview with his daughter, he set out into the gulch once more, his brain in a whirl over the many thoughts that were flitting across his mind. In truth, he was not a little worried over the fact that matters were getting rather unpleasantly personal.

Big Buckskin was in the camp!

So was Sir Royal Rignold, who was quick to form suspicions when foul play was laid in preparation for him.

Should the sport and the Englishman meet, Jubal Andre felt positive that some word would fall from the lips of the former that would knock in the head all of his (Andre's) plans for making his daughter the Lady of Chelton Castle.

It therefore was most important that there should be no delay in the removal of the sport, before he could do any further harm.

"If I can only find some of the Murdock gang I'll soon learn what is the cause of all this trouble, and why they don't earn the money."

As luck would have it, he soon after found Red Eagle skulking about the outskirts of the town as if he was afraid of being seen.

"What are you doing here? You act as if you were half scared out of your wits!" Andre said, confronting him.

"Red Eagle great brave—no git scared!" was the red-skin's haughty reply. "Red Eagle wait for enemy—kill him!"

A sudden thought entered the plotter's mind.

"Who is this enemy, chief?" he asked.

"Bad pale-fac. Kill many of Red Eagle's people. Call um Big Buckskin."

"Humph! I wonder what strange fatality put that into my mind?" Jubal Andre muttered. "Something seemed to tell me that he was waiting for Joe Wilton."

Then, aloud, he said:

"You consider Big Buckskin your enemy, then?"

"Ugh! yes. Red Eagle hate Big Buckskin. Kill him when git chance."

"Look out he don't kill you. Where are the Murdocks?"

"Dunno!"

"Take care! none of your lying, you rascal! I want to see the captain, at once, on important business."

"Give Red Eagle dollar, den he show!" was the wily answer.

"You red devil! you're playing for money, too, are you? Well, here is the dollar. Now tell me where I can find Burk Murdock."

Red Eagle waited until he had the dollar first before giving the desired information.

"Captain live over there," he then announced, pointing to a newly-finished log cabin, a dozen rods away.

Jubal Andre directed his footsteps toward the cabin, leaving Red Eagle to keep his vigil, in hopes of getting a chance for revenge upon Big Buckskin.

When he arrived at the cabin, Andre recalled the signal the red-skin had employed at the time of their visit to the retreat in the mountains, and used it in his rap upon the door.

"Who's thar? Come in!" the captain's rough voice called out, and Andre obeyed.

Inside, the cabin was rough and unplastered, and furnished only with some stools and an unplanned board table.

Jack Murdock was lying upon the floor near the fire-place, rolled up in a blanket, evidently sleeping off the effects of a drunk.

Burk was seated by the table, with a bottle of liquor and glasses conveniently at hand.

"Hello!" he growled, as his employer entered.

"What the devil brings you here?"

"Business!" Andre responded, decisively, as he took a seat. "Nothing but business could tempt me to seek your society."

"Humph! you're cussed complimentary, ain't you? What d'ye want?"

"I want to know what I am to understand by your silence and inactivity?"

"You mean about Big Buckskin?"

"Certainly. He is here, and all you have to do is work."

"Yes, I reckon so. But, you see, we've about concluded that the job's too risky to tackle."

"What?"

"We can't tech it. You'll have to hunt up some one else."

"Then, sir, hand me back my thousand dollars!"

"Ha! ha! ain't you green? When you get a smell of that again, you'll have cause to whistle right merrily."

"You ruffian, if you do not fulfill your promise, or restore my money, I'll hand you over to the law."

"Bah! you would hardly do that, when such an action would do you fully as much injury as myself. The only thing that will prompt us to go on with the job is an additional two thousand in hand now. Give me this, and I swear that Big Buckskin shall not live to see another sunset!"

"I'll see you to the furthest corner of the earth first!"

"Well, just as ye like. We're a thousand dollars in, at the least, and if you squeal on us you'll only get yourself into hot water."

"We shall see! we shall see!" Andre snarled, as he arose and took his departure. "If I mistake not, you'll wish you had done differently."

Big Buckskin was waited upon by a number of the leading men of Bill's Bonanza, and importuned to accept the captaincy of the new Vigilance Committee which it was determined should be organized at once.

After some hesitation, he consented to act in that capacity, and was given the privilege of choosing his own men.

This was no easy thing, as he full well realized that he must study each man well, if he would make his party strong and trustworthy.

During the day, while sauntering across the gulch, he suddenly encountered the giant, old Gulliver, who was sitting upon a rock, evidently in deep meditation.

"Hello!" Buckskin cried. "What are you ruminating about, Gulliver?"

"I war jest thinkin' about the ups an' downs o' this hyar flickerin' candle o' life. Fer instance, last night I got up on my ear, and turned about an' went down on my back, quicker'n a cat can spit. Queer world! The giants aire babies, now-a-days, an' the babies aire giants!"

"Yes, there is some truth in that. It ain't always the biggest horse that pulls the most. By the way, Gulliver, I am quietly organizing a Vigilance Committee, for the purpose of capturing the road-agents. I want men whom I can implicitly rely on, and who are not afraid to

fight, if necessary. I have already secured several, and I judge you're another recruit I need!"

The bullwhacker looked astonished.

"See hyar!" he grumbled, "I kin stand a good deal of chaffin', but I can't stand everything."

"But I mean what I say. You ain't so bad a pilgrim as you look, an' I know thar is lots o' good in you if you only let it be coaxed out. What do you say? Will you join us, and swear fidelity to our cause?"

Gulliver took off his hat and scratched his matted head.

"Waal, durned ef I know what tew do. You give me a swipe across my mouth, and then blacked my eye—an' now ye want me ter jine ye in a racket, when I orter jump ont'er ye an' tread on ye! Dunno but ye give me what I deserved, however. Hadn't no bizness to go rubbin' around an' arthquake. Reckon I'll jine y., providin' ef I git licked by ary other galoot, you'll take my part."

"It's a bargain," said Buckskin. "Now, understand that you are to pretend to be my enemy all the time, and if you are besought to join a gang of outlaws, sail in and join, and report to me where they are located. We'll then sail in and capture 'em."

"An' I'm to appear like I war mad at ye, hey?"

"Yes."

"But thar's to be none o' yer shoulder-bitin'!"

"Of course not. Well leave that entirely out of the matter. I'm yours to command."

"Wull, then, ye can count me in. I'm as squar' as a king, an' ye kin depend on me."

"I knew it, pard, and I trust you."

Big Buckskin then gave him a few instructions and returned to the heart of the camp, feeling that he had achieved a victory in securing the giant on his side.

On his arrival at the Bonanza, Little Bill was behind the bar, and engaged in arranging the bottles and dusting things off in general.

"Well, young man, how are you this mornin'?" Buckskin asked, as he approached.

"First-rate," Billy replied, stiffly, not forgetting his foresworn vengeance on the man who would not give him a chance to "blow off," and as he spoke he pointed to a placard upon the wall which bore the significant reminder, "No Trust."

Big Buckskin gave vent to a prolonged whistle.

"Well, dash your impudence," he said. "Who asked you for trust?"

"Humph! you did! Fellers as wants tick allus tries to play up soft on me. But, 'twon't work. Can't no more shet my eye up than ye kin larn a hen the multiplication o' compound fractions. Scuse me, ef ye've got any cash."

"Presumably I have enough to see me through," Buckskin replied. "I wished to inquire if there are any letters here for me?"

"Dunno. Who aire you?"

"Big Buckskin."

"No letters here for you, then."

"I also have another name—Joseph Wilton."

"Then, here's a letter fer ye. Gal jest left it awhile ago."

And he handed the sport a delicate letter, with the name "Joseph Wilton" directed in a delicate style of chirography.

Big Buckskin did not have to ask a description of the person who left it, for he readily recognized the handwriting.

"From your gum-drop, sugar-an'-molasses gal, eh?" Little Bill remarked, tantalizingly.

"Know what it is to be in luv wi' one o' them aire. Used to have my eye sot on a pretty Injun squaw, but I couldn't raise enough hosses ter buy her!"

Buckskin made no answer, but sat down on a settee, lit a cigar, and leisurely tore open the epistle and glanced at its contents.

It read as follows:

"MR. JOSEPH WILTON, SIR:—Our sudden meeting last evening was as much of a surprise to me as it was to you, and I can assure you that I am sorry for it, for your presumption in addressing me I consider an unpardonable offense. I am lech to believe that you are so insane as to think that I could ever be anything to you. My childish indiscretion in marrying you will soon be dissolved by divorce, and then I shall be at liberty to marry again."

"I trust you will be gentleman enough to remain silent, as I can never care for you, and should be pained were I ever compelled to speak to one so far beneath me in social standing."

"I write this in order that no interview may ever be necessary, and hoping we will remain strangers, as ever."

AGNES ANDRE.

A faint smile curved the lips of the buckskin sport as he tore the letter into shreds, but he spoke not.

The glitter in his eyes, however, indicated that the letter had not made a very favorable impression upon him, so far as his recreant wife was concerned.

CHAPTER VIII

BUCKSKIN SWOONED AND SO DOES JACK MURDOCK.

LATER that day Sir Royal Rignold, tired of the house, managed to crawl out for a stroll about the gulch, although he was too lame and sore to undergo very much exercise.

He was furious, too, that he had allowed himself to be dissuaded from challenging the handsome sport, Big Buckskin, for he smarted with chagrin at the treatment he had received.

Proud and arrogant, as befitted his title and position, it was like gall and wormwood to be so worsted by a man of no rank—an American rough—as he considered Buckskin to be.

Hardly satisfied was he yet, but what he should take the liberty of breaking his promise to Agnes Andre, and bring the sport to account.

With such thoughts in mind he sauntered though the gulch, and paid little attention to where he was going, until he suddenly found himself in the presence of Denver Doll, who was plucking a bouquet of wild flowers, a profusion of which grew in the gulch.

"Ah! excuse me!" he said, tipping his hat. "Hope my intrusion is pardonable. But really, tis a most pretty picture to see one so young and fair engaged in the pastime of flower gathering!"

"Sir!" Denver Doll retorted, coldly. "You will please keep your flattery to yourself. I do not know you."

"That matters not. It's an easy thing to get acquainted, you know. I am Sir Royal Rignold, of Chelton Castle, Derbyshire, England."

"You don't say so!" Doll retorted, with biting sarcasm. "Why didn't you say you were the Prince of Wales. It would have had just as little effect. As for getting acquainted with me, that is impossible. Go and waste your praises on Miss Andre, who no doubt has time to listen to taffy talk."

"Oh, no! One tires who pays constant attention."

"And that's why you left the banks of famed Killarney, is it?" Doll fired back.

Sir Royal's face grew white in an instant, and his gaze became sternly riveted upon her face.

"What do you mean?" he demanded in a husky tone. "Speak girl—what do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing, only I allow you'd look much better back on the old sod, a-feedin' av ther pigs an' ther chickens!" Doll answered carelessly, as she resumed the making of her bouquet.

"I am not an Irishman, but a lineal descendant of royalty," he said, loftily. "You Americans are very backward in understanding and politeness. In England a peasant deems it the right of honor to be addressed by one of the nobility like myself."

Doll burst in a loud laugh.

"So you count yourself some pumpkins, eh?" she responded. "Well! well! I don't know why it is. We American girls don't care any more for a conceited galoot wi' a Sir to his name, than a thoroughbred high-toned horse-fly cares for a burro. 'Tain't the title that makes a man hyer, but the man himself. So now, please move on. I do not want your acquaintance. If you don't move, I'll call Big Buckskin!"

"Bah! he is a puppy!"

"You bet he's puppy enough to lick any Johnny Bulldog!" Doll rejoined. "Come! move on!"

And to enforce her order, she drew a revolver menacingly, at which the knight moved off, growling unintelligibly as he did so.

While Denver Doll muttered to herself:

"The first seed planted, and I think it will grow. How quick he changed color when I hinted about Killarney, the home of Nellie Kelly."

She spoke truly. The seed had been planted in the breast of Sir Royal, and was quick to grow.

"What does that woman, or girl, rather, know about me and my past?" he mused, as he strolled on. "She cleverly turned off the hint, but it hardly deceived me. She meant to put me in mind of that Irish girl I was so foolish as to marry. Egad! can she have followed me here? If so, I'll murder her!"

The matter grew more and more momentous to him, and weighed upon his mind until he grew fairly desperate.

It was about the time he had reached this

stage of feeling that a voice in his ear gave him a violent start.

"Ex-ke-use, sir, but will you loan me your attention a moment? My name is Gum—George Washington Gum, general canvassing agent for all the leading works on psychology, physiology, electricity, useful knowledge, literature and science. I have a beautiful little volume here, entitled 'How to Put On Airs.' Now, my dear sir, judging by your appearance, this volume would be most happily adapted to your requirements."

Sir Royal turned and gazed in astonishment at the superannuated book-agent—the same sleek, glib-tongued man it was who had invaded the outlaws' retreat several weeks before; but, if anything, he looked more lean and lank now than at that first appearance.

"Away with you, vagabond!" Sir Royal ordered, haughtily. "What do you imagine I could want with your trash?"

"But you don't understand," G. W. Gum went on, unabashed. "I have books adapted to every peculiar phase of human character, and for all ages. Here's what you are seriously in need of—'How to Be Polite.' Now you couldn't study a more useful work. I have also a useful work—'The Butcher's Manual'—tells you how to kill hogs, and so forth. But, the best of all, here's a new work just in press—'The Rogues and Rascals of London,' founded on authentic facts and brought down to the present day, including the history of the noted counterfeiter, Jack De Haven!"

And the book-agent took out a publication list and began an examination of it carefully.

With a face as white as marble, Sir Royal Rignold had turned hastily and walked away toward the Andre shanty.

Apparently, George Washington Gum did not discover this act until he had finished a search of the list, when he looked up and saw Sir Royal several rods distant.

Then a low laugh escaped his lips and he shuffled off toward the Bonanza Hotel, in the office of which he met Big Buckskin and Denver Doll.

"Hello! what have we here—a Zulu, as I live!" Doll laughed, at the sight of the curious specimen of humanity, which the agent really was.

"No! no! fair lady—you mistake. I am simply George Washington Gum—a general agent for all the latest book publications of the day. Can't I sell you a work on how to make love, oyster puddin's, apple dumplings, or how to get married, settle down and become happy?"

"Some other day, Georgie. Buckskin, can't you buy something?"

"Eh? Buckskin, did you say?" Gum demanded, eagerly.

"Of course—Big Buckskin, the best man of his inches in the West. Why?"

"Then he's the very feller I want to see," the agent declared, extending his bony hand. "Mr. Buckskin, it does me proud to meet you! I have been lookin' for you far and wide, because I have a dumfounding revelation to make to you!"

"Is that so?" the sport asked, dryly. "Well, what is it?"

"Ex-ke-use, but if I tell you, I dare say you will compensate me for the valuable time I occupy in telling you?"

"Of course, if your revelation is of any importance!" Buckskin answered.

"Then come to some private apartment where there are no prying ears, and I will unfold!"

Accordingly he was shown by Doll into a private room in the rear of the office, where all three became seated.

"Now, then, go ahead," Big Buckskin ordered. "If you have anything to say that is worth listening to be quick about it!"

"Exactly. Quick sales and small profits is my motto. You are Big Buckskin, or otherwise Joe Wilton?"

"Yes."

"You have heard of a gang of desperadoes known as the Murdock Brothers?"

"I have."

"You also know a minister named Jubal Andre?"

"Yes."

"Married his daughter?"

"Correct."

"Don't live with her?"

"No!"

Buckskin answered the questions rather hesitatingly.

He was aware that the gaze of Denver Doll was fixed upon him in a stare of surprise.

"Well," G. W. Gum went on, "some weeks ago I chanced to drop into the den of these Murdock, hoping to sell one of my valuable

works. While there there came a rap, and I was importuned to wait behind a screen."

"Yes. Go on."

"Well, while there I was a silent witness to a deadly compact. Of the visitors there were three—Jubal Andre, his daughter, and an Indian named Red Eagle."

Big Buckskin whistled. He was beginning to catch the drift of what the revelation was to be.

"Go ahead!" he commanded, eagerly.

"Well, this Jubal Andre did all the talkin' for his side, and the object of his visit was to hire the Murdock to put two persons out of the way—namely, you and your son. He stated that his daughter was desirous of marrying an English aristocrat, but could not do so until you and the child were silenced."

"And the boy—my son—where did he say he could be found?"

"He did not state definitely, but said the boy was roving somewhere through the West with a female companion."

"Thank Heaven, he is alive then! I will now search to the ends of the earth but what I'll find him. But, go on! Was a contract made?"

"Yes. The captain of the gang agreed to put you out of the way for a thousand dollars down and another thousand when the job was done."

"Humph! Jubal Andre is playing a high game!" the sport muttered, rather grimly. "Is that all?"

"Yes. I made my escape then, with the resolve to hunt you up and warn you."

Big Buckskin took several gold pieces from his pocket and tossed them into the lap of the book-agent.

"You deserve to be paid and to receive thanks too."

Gum slipped the gold pieces into his pocket with a satisfied grin and arose.

"Much obliged to you," he said. "I'd give up canvassing if I could catch on to such a snap every day."

When he was gone Denver Doll remarked:

"That fellow ain't what he seems. I am going to watch him."

Buckskin smiled.

"He's a traveling Bohemian, who lives on his wits," he assumed. "He has, however, done me a favor of no mean proportions. I will be more wide awake than before."

"You will need to be. I am very much interested in your case, and will help you all I can."

"Thank you. You have already won my sincere gratitude. One knows how to appreciate kindness after being buffeted about the world. My marriage to Agnes Andre proved to be a most unhappy one, and I have often wished myself dead."

"Say not so. Life should not be made a burden to one, no matter what disappointments come."

"Were I free, I perhaps might think the same as you; but, tied by my marriage vows, and also guided by a desire for my only child, I of course have naught to do but remain—a fool, perhaps!"

He was silent a moment, and then went on:

"I need not necessarily lead this wild life, for I could retire into the quiet of a peaceful existence, with a competency to subsist upon. But for the enjoyment I would have I might as well shut myself up in a prison, for in either place I would be equally alone. I say this to you because, somehow, in the few hours of our acquaintanceship I have grown to regard you as a friend."

"You are right in doing so. I am a friend of every honest, right-minded person. Cheer up. Something may occur that will make a change in your life. In the mean time let me manage your case, and in the end I will surprise you. I know a few things that you are not aware of, and if I mistake not, my little schemes will eventually be fraught with happiness for you. I'm also working up a case for a big English estate, in which Sir Royal Rignold is concerned, along with several others."

"Humph! the less you have to do with that case the better you'll be off. This Rignold is the puppy who aspires to the hand of my wife. Let him go! After he gets her he'll be sorry enough."

"Probably. But leave it to me, and I will work some results that will please you."

"Very well. Go ahead; I will remain inactive, and give you full sway. You already have excited my admiration, not only for yourself, but for your indomitable pluck; and I give you fair warning not to do too much for me!"

"I will try not to," Doll answered, arising with a mischievous laugh.

Then they separated, Denver Doll going in search of Little Bill, and Big Buckskin retiring to his room.

Later in the day, as Denver Doll stood upon the veranda of the Bonanza, watching the busy throng as it moved through the gulch, a man came sauntering along, with swaggering gait, as if he felt the importance of his rather flashy attire.

Denver Doll's eyes were on him before he was near her, and her gaze never left his face until he was about passing, when she spoke.

"Jack!"

He turned, as if electrified.

"Jack!" she repeated.

Her eyes had met his now, and were burning with unnatural brilliancy.

The man seemed to tremble as he stood, his eyes never leaving hers.

"Jack!" she repeated again, and this time sternly. "Down, Jack!"

For an instant it seemed as if he was undergoing a terrible mental struggle; then a sickly smile came over his face, and he dropped upon his knees.

"Up Jack!" she ordered, a moment later.

He arose like magic.

"Come!" she said, turning and entering the hotel office.

And Jack Murdock, of the notorious Murdock Brothers, followed her, as a trained dog would have followed its master.

CHAPTER IX.

DOLL'S CAPTURE AND SAL'S NEW DEAL.

THE power which Denver Doll held over the outlaw was mesmeric, and she had him so under her call that she could make him obey her at will.

Several years ago, before he joined his brother in their career of crime, he had been Denver Doll's youthful lover, and it was at this time that she had discovered her wondrous power over him, and had practiced it a number of times, more for the novelty of the thing than for any other reason.

So that she had made Jack Murdock her slave for life, no matter where they might meet.

Doll led the way to the apartment in the rear of the office, and the young outlaw meekly followed, and became seated at the girl's motion.

She then knelt in front of him and drew a revolver, after which she passed one hand to and fro before his face.

This motion appeared to have the effect of breaking the spell, for he gave a violent start as he saw her there holding the weapon leveled at his breast.

"Jack Murdock, I have got you!" she said, triumphantly.

"Eh! is it you, Doll? What brought me here?" and he gazed around him in a sort of dazed way.

"The same old power, Jack!" was the answer, at which a slight shiver passed over him.

"Yes," Doll went on, "I saw you coming up the street, and allowed that you were a fish worth snaring; so I told you to come in, and you came right along like a little man."

Jack growled out an oath.

"Curses on that infernal power you hold over me! What do you propose to do with me?"

"Use you, Jack—redeem you, if possible. You are leading a wild, criminal life, and I'm going to make you give it up and betray your gang into custody."

"Never! I'd die before I'd go back on a pal. Even you can't make me do that."

"But I can, though, and don't you forget it! You do just what I will—how are you going to help yourself?"

"It would be mean of you to take advantage of your infernal power over me and cause me to bring my own brother to the gallows!" he growled.

"Not a bit of it! Your brother and his gang have done many deeds far meaner than that, and the law wants 'em, as an example to other evil-doers. Tell me, now, wouldn't a free, honest life be better than a life crowned with the knowledge that you are an outcast and a villain, whom every honest person turns from in horror?"

"Dunno but you're right. But I couldn't never give Burk up to the law, nobow ye can make it."

"But I say you shall, or I'll arrest you right here, and cast you into confinement. Bill's Bonanza is a new town, and ye know how new towns deal out justice, I dare say!"

"Arrest me, and be cursed. I'll never squeal on our pals!"

"But consider. I can throw you into the trance again, and then make you tell me all I want to know, and arrest you in the bargain. So you see, I've got you anyway."

A sullen, dogged expression came over the young outlaw's face.

"Go ahead and do your worst. I'll never go back on a pal with my own consent."

"We'll find out!" Doll muttered, beginning to work the spell on him again.

In an incredibly short space of time he was thoroughly mesmerized and in her power.

"Now, then, tell me where the present rendezvous of the gang is," she commanded, sternly.

He did not answer.

There was a set, determined expression upon his face, and a shiver traversed his frame.

"Speak!" Doll cried, stamping her foot. "How dare you disobey me?"

Still no answer, but, in its place, that dogged silence.

This convinced Doll that she had overrated her power to some extent. Fearful that he might shake off the influence of the spell, she hastily procured a pair of handcuffs and made him powerless, so far as his hands were concerned.

This done, she brought him once more out of the trance.

His rage knew no bounds when he discovered that his hands were bound.

"Curse you, Denver Doll! Little I thought, when I used to know you, that you would ever turn against me thus."

"Nor did I think that you would turn into a life of crime and misery. I offered you a fair chance, but you refused; and, accordingly, it is my duty to arrest you."

"Go ahead. You couldn't make me peach on my pals, an' I never will. They'll get me out."

"We shall see to it that they don't. For the present, I shall keep you locked up in this room. Here you will be safe. If you attempt to create a racket I'll come in and gag you."

She then left the room and locked the door after her, well knowing that it would be impossible for Jack to escape without outside assistance.

And she further believed that, after due deliberation, he would change his mind and come to terms, rather than run the risk of getting his head into Judge Lynch's merciless noose.

Little Bill was always wide awake and about town, when not on duty at the hotel, and if there was anything going on that was worth seeing he was generally on hand.

About sunset that day, as he stood on the banks of the gulch creek speculating as to whether or no the roily waters contained any of the funny tribe, he heard angry words close at hand, and crept to the cover of a clump of bushes near by.

A moment later Sir Royal Rignold and Agnes Andre came into view, and paused near where Bill had stood.

"I tell you I am not ready yet!" the latter said, impatiently. "You will have to give me time."

"I have no time to give!" Rignold declared, sharply. "Something has occurred that makes it imperative that I should return to England at once."

"What?"

"Oh! it don't matter what."

"But I say it does. I won't have a man who won't tell me his secrets."

"Then it's settled. Sir Royal Rignold will never be bossed by any woman; set your heart at rest on that! I will give you half an hour to decide. Marry me to-morrow night or never!"

"Oh! I don't know what to say. I don't know whether papa will consent to a hasty marriage."

"Humph! he's only too glad to marry you off well."

Agnes Andre did not answer. Her gaze instinctively wandered toward the Bonanza hotel, where the handsome sport, Big Buckskin, was pacing to and fro across the veranda.

Sir Royal saw her gaze directed toward the sport, and he seized her wrist fiercely.

"Oh! so that is why you hesitate about a speedy marriage, is it?" he hissed. "Tell me, girl; what is there between him and you?"

"Nothing!" Agnes replied, with a dry, harsh laugh. "I was just wondering if you could grow into such a rough creature."

"Never fear; Sir Royal Rignold is none of your low American stock. Do you know, if I thought you were anything to that fellow I'd kill you?"

"But I am not!"

"Never was!"

"Never was!"

"Well, I must believe you, I suppose. But how about the answer?"

"It is yes, I guess. You must take me as I am."

"Of course. We will set the time—to-morrow evening, at nine o'clock."

Then there was an exchange of kisses, after which they walked away.

And Little Bill crept from his covert, grinning from ear to ear.

"Golly! we're goin' to have a reg'lar hitchin'-up match fer sure!" he ejaculated. "Reckon my pard, Dollbaby, would like ter know about that."

And accordingly, he went back to the Bonanza, and told the Detective Queen what he had seen and heard.

Doll was not surprised, nor did she say much about the matter; but she kept up a terrible thinking, and was constantly forming plans in her mind for the achievement of the victory she expected to win.

On her return to the shanty, Agnes Andre privately made known to her father the desire of Sir Royal, for an immediate consummation of their nuptials.

"Well! what did you say?" the old rogue asked, anxiously.

"I said yes, as a matter of course," Agnes replied.

"I cannot afford to lose a handsome fortune, even if I do run a little risk."

"You are right there. But, mind you, there's something strange in this sudden action on Sir Royal's part. I fancy the fellow has some secrets of his own which he would not wish others to know."

"Perhaps. But, pshaw! what need I care, after I am once Lady Rignold, of Chelton Castle. I can then tame him down to suit my own notion."

And both father and daughter laughed.

"I have come to no fixed conclusion how we are going to get rid of Big Buckskin!" Jubal Andre went on. "I saw Burk Murdock this morning, and he refused to do anything without two thousand dollars more be paid into his hand. That I flatly refused to do."

"Why? You could well afford to have paid that, after what you made off of Sir Royal."

"Not much! I'm going to look out for myself with that money, you bet! If you want to pay any more do it out of your own pocket!"

"You well understand that I have no money," Agnes protested. "If you don't fix matters up, you know what the result will be. You'll have your daughter back on your hands in an incredibly short space of time."

Jubal Andre uttered a growl, and was about to give some sour answer, when there came a loud rap on the door.

"Come in!" he called out, supposing it was the Chinese servant whom he had sent on an errand.

The door promptly opened, and Sal Slap, the proprietress of the Guzzler's Glory, made her appearance.

Jubal Andre and Agnes could but utter exclamations of astonishment, for the old hag was by far the ugliest looking creature they ever had occasion to meet.

"Don't be skeart," Sal said, with a grotesque, horrible grin, as she helped herself to a seat. "I know I ain't as purty as a noddin' blue-bell, but that don't make no difference. I'm old Sal Slap, and I'm a screamer, and downright proud of it, too. How ye gittin' on, Jubal—you an' yer darter, who has grown inter a right peart lady, ef I do say it?"

"Woman, I don't know you. Begone, or I'll have you locked up for a lunatic!" Andre cried, feeling alarmed, evidently.

"Don't know me, hey?" Sal went on, taking out a box, and helping herself to a pinch of snuff. "Well, I dare say not, for I've grown prettier as my years advanced, an' had heaps o' experience. Aggie, thar, looks nateral, however, and you would, only you're cultivatin' a red nose. Don't remember Dorothy, do ye?"

And she uttered a a mocking laugh!

Jubal Andre uttered an oath.

"You are not Dorothy!" he declared.

"Reckon I ain't no one else, tho' since I left yer employ, I've been roughing it under the handle of Sal Slap. Hain't quite so purty, but I'm a heap smarter than I was then!"

"For Heaven's sake! A terrible change has certainly come over you. What are you doing here, woman? Explain yourself!"

"I am keepin' the Guzzler's Glory hyar in Bill's Bonanza, of which I'm one of the first inhabitants. The object o' my present call is jest to renew acquaintance, ye see. Et does my eyes good ter see ye both, fer ye know, Jubal, I allers *old* have a sort o' hankerin' arter ye."

"Enough of such nonsense. You are an unwelcome visitor, Dorothy, and your departure would give me a great relief."

"So? Well, now, that's curious. But I don't mind your peevishness, Jubal. I know you mean all right. But if you don't, ye orter know better than to buck against me. I can do ye piles of harm just at present, if ye come any o' your stuck-up dodges around me. I hear yer gal is goin' to be married tew a kord, duke, or some other high-fangled cuss. Bet a cookie he is as innocent as a clam regardin' Aggie's first marriage."

The Andres both winced.

"Cuss you!" Jubal hissed. "If you betray the secret I'll murder ye!"

"Oh, no! I'm allers heeled. I'm gittin' new notions inter my head, too. I'm tired o' roughing it, and aspire to live in luxury the rest o' my days. I've got a leetle spare cash, but want more, an' it's only nateral that you should want to furnish it, arter all I've done fer you an' yer darter Aggie."

"Not a cent will ye get from me, and you can swear to it," Jubal Andre retorted. "You got your pay once. What more do you want?"

"Just what I'm going to get, or squeal—cash!" the hag declared. "D'ye know I've got the dead wood on ye, and ef ye don't come to Limerick I'm going to make ye dance? Ye'll remember the boy is alive yet what ye hired me to murder!"

"Where?" Jubal Andre hissed.

"Where I can produce him without much trouble. Now, may be Sir Royal, as he is called, would like to adopt the kid, along w' Aggie."

"Furies take you, woman! If you dare to hint the existence of a child to him I'll tear your heart out!" and Andre's face was white with its vengeful passion.

"A tough old time you'd have at it. My heart is a hardened one."

"How much do you want to kill the boy and keep your mouth shut?"

"Waal, I allow a thousand dollars would cover my mouth. But as fer ther boy, durn me ef I'll hurt him. He's as cute as a squirrel, he is."

"Either you put the boy out of the way or get no money."

"Then I'll squeal!"

"Do so at your peril!"

Sal Slap uttered a horrid laugh.

"Well, think as you like," she sneered. "If I hain't handed an envelope w' a \$1,000 note in it ter-night I'll squeal."

She then took her leave.

Jubal Andre and his daughter faced each other with startled expressions.

"It's narrowing into close quarters," he snarled.

"Yes. You'll have to do something."

"Curse it, yes! Dorothy must be silenced at all hazards. I shall have to buy her."

"And Big Buckskin—" "Is here!" a voice answered, as a man stepped into the shanty. "I am glad to be just in time to participate in the arrangements for my disposal."

CHAPTER X.

BURK MURDOCK STRIKES AND GETS STRICKEN.

THE sudden appearance of Big Buckskin, caused Jubal and Agnes Andre to leap to their feet in consternation.

The faces of both grew white, and they stood literally at bay, as if expecting an attack.

Buckskin advanced into the room, and closed the door behind him, after which he placed his back against it, a strange, hard smile coming over his features.

"Well, you seem to be surprised," he said. "Am I a bear, that you stare at me, so?"

"You are an intruder, here!" Jubal Andre retorted sternly.

"Can't see how you make that out. I believe it is customary for one to visit one's wife, and daddy-in-law, occasionally."

"Begone, man! You have no such claim on me. Begone! I say, or I will have you cast back into prison from which you have escaped."

"Hal hal! That was liberal of you to provide for me, eight years, wasn't it? But as it happens, now, I remained in jail about two weeks. A homeless chap wanted a permanent place to stay in and I let him try his hand on mine. So you see, you got left on that calculation as you will on all others. In fact, you are getting pretty close to the end of your rope."

"You are possibly mistaken!" Jubal Andre sneered.

"Not a bit of it!" the sport replied, coolly. "Despite the noble plot of yourself and my exquisite bride, to kill me, I am still alive. The Murdocks are evidently not disposed to tackle a man whom they have been dodging for some time."

Jubal Andre grew livid with rage, for he knew that the sport had in some strange way made himself aware of their infamous compact.

Big Buckskin went on, coolly:

"I just overheard you mention something about making a disposal of me, and as I am quite interested in such matter I'd like to have you state your plan."

"If you mind your business, you will likely fare all right!" Andre growled. "But if you meddle in our affairs, you'll rue it. My daughter does not like you, and desires you to keep as much out of her sight as is possible."

"I am aware of her very affectionate feelings toward me," was the taunting answer. "It is a pity she can love only me, when so many poodles and snobs need her attention. But, by the way, I hear that the fair Agnes is about to marry the English mannikin who calls himself Sir Royal Rignold?"

"You are misinformed!" Agnes returned, haughtily. "Until I get a divorce, you probably understand that I cannot marry any one, unless fortune should will it that you die, soon!"

"Fortune, presumably, will not accommodate you, in this respect. However, I came to warn you that I am aware of your design to put me out of the way, and any move in that direction will be frustrated, and you'll find yourself cast into jail. A word to the wise is sufficient!"

He turned and left the shanty.

As he was crossing the gulch, toward the Bonanza, an arrow sent with great speed, just grazed the tip of his ear.

Wheeling, he was just in time to see a figure dodge down out of sight, behind a large boulder, and it required no second thought to convince him that it was the vindictive Red Eagle.

Drawing a revolver, he dropped upon his knees, and crept toward the rock, keeping his gaze on the alert, so as not to allow the savage to escape.

To reach the boulder behind which the savage was concealed, a number of clumps of bushes had to be skirted; in passing them, Buckskin had no thought of enemies being concealed therein, until—

Suddenly he felt himself borne flat to the earth, with a weight upon his back of several human bodies, and a hand was clapped over his mouth.

In quick time he was helplessly bound and gagged and undisputably a prisoner of the Murdock Brothers.

It was now evident that the arrow fired by Red Eagle had only been sent as a decoy to lure Big Buckskin into the Murdock's trap, for the warrior now skulked forward with a demoniac grin.

"You smuggle him off down the trail," were Burk Murdock's orders to his companions, "and guard him closely in the cave, while I go and hunt up Jack and make terms with Andre. Curious what has become of Jack!"

He then left them to get the prisoner out of the town, without attracting attention, while he went more into the heart of the camp in search of Jack, who, as the reader knows, Denver Doll had locked up in the room at the Bonanza Hotel.

After a deal of inquiry, by which he succeeded in learning nothing satisfactory, he came to the Bonanza Hotel, just as Denver Doll was about entering it, in company with Little Bill.

Burk Murdock was ignorant of the fact that the Detective Queen had been intimate with his brother, but knowing her profession, he did not care to converse with her.

But the moment she saw him she called out:

"Hello there! Looking for some one?"

He turned with a start, but quickly recovered his composure.

"Who said I was lukin' fer any one?" he demanded, and then wheeled and stalked on.

Denver Doll sprang down the steps and drew a revolver.

He faced about, however, with a cocked weapon leveled at her.

"Curse you!" he roared, "I'll blow your—"

The remainder of the sentence was drowned by the report of his weapon.

Denver Doll tottered back, the bullet having grazed the cap of her left shoulder, and her weapon dropped to the ground.

Murdock cocked his weapon quickly, with the evident intention of finishing the job, but just then resounded two distinct pistol reports, and Burk Murdock, the noted desperado, threw up his hands and took his last breath as he fell to earth.

One shot Little Bill had fired, and that had struck the outlaw in the thigh; the other, which had pierced his brain, had been sent by the unerring aim of no less a personage than George Washington Gum, who had opportunely been approaching the hotel from another direction.

A crowd quickly gathered about, and the excitement naturally ran high.

"Who is this fellow?" several asked.

"I can answer that question!" Denver Doll cried, walking forward with an effort. "That man is, or rather was, Burk Murdock, leader of the notorious Murdock Brothers—for he is now dead!"

"And I, George Washington Gum, was the feller ter put the rat-hole in his temple. Gents, my mission here is as a book-agent. I represent the leading publishing houses of the country. I have a beautiful volume here, entitled the 'Art of Shooting,' also 'How to Make Love,' 'How to Play Games,' 'How to Eat,' 'How to Conduct Funerals'—in fact, anything and everything. Who wants to buy?"

But the excitement was too great for Gum to push his case successfully.

The news quickly spread throughout the town that the notorious Burk Murdock had been killed, and there was rejoicing among the majority of the populace.

So excited did the rougher element grow that the body of the unfortunate man was strapped to one end of a long hickory pole, and it was raised and planted amid thundering cheers!

Wild and unfeeling, these men who participated in this unseemly celebration numbered a majority, and the minority did not dare interfere.

Fifty feet above terra firma was Burk Murdock, at least, if he never got any further toward the gates of the Eternal City, and a most novel and striking example, too, of the vengeance of the men of Bill's Bonanza upon their enemies.

After declaring the identity of the outlaw, Denver Doll went into the hotel, and got Nelly Kelly to dress her wound, after which she went forth into the gulch, again, feeling all right.

The sight of the elevated corpse of Burk Murdock gave her a start, and she used her influence to have it taken down, but all to no avail.

The idea was vociferously vetoed.

She was searching about for Big Buckskin, when she met the giant, the self-styled Gulliver, from Lilliput.

"Glad I've met ye," he said, calling her to one side. "Bin lukin' fer ye, me fairy Lilliputian. See; they've roached the desperado."

Doll nodded without speaking.

She did not admire the huge human—or trust him—in any particular.

"Waal, that's good. See, I an' Buckskin made up friends, an' he delegated me as one o' his Wizer-lants, an' ef some one hadn't 'a' fixed the chap yonder, I should. By the way, that's bizness ahead!"

"What kind?"

"Why, reg'lar quorum biz. D ye know whar Big Buckskin is?"

"No, I have been searching for him."

"Waal, he is captered, an' run off by the rest o' Murdock's gang. See'd the whole purceedin' myself, but dasn't move for fear I'd git a buzzer in my ear. Heard Burk, yander, order 'em to take him to a cave, down the gulch, an' they dragged him away, but they ain't goin' ter kill him till the captain jines 'em. Ef they hear o' the captain's death they'll most likely carve him up to one's."

"You are right. You shall be rewarded for this, Gulliver. Come with me. Little Bill knows where this cave is, for I heard him tell of it one day. We'll have those outlaws yet."

She sought out Little Bill, and made known to him Gulliver's report.

"Yes, I know the place," he declared. "It is a deep cavern twenty feet up the mountain side, w' a big ledge overhangin' it, an' a similar ledge in front of it. Bet I know a capertal plan! Let a gang o' fellers take a round-about way an' git on top the ledge, from whar they can peer down onto the lower ledge. I'll git down the gulch an' scream out like a woman w'ot's got coumpition fits. The outlaws will rush out onto the lower ledge, to see what's ther matter, an' the fellers above can drop down lassoes an' hook 'em up like fish."

"Bill, you're a genius. It shall be done."

"Hey hum! The babies is giants nowadays, an' the giants is babies!" sighed Gulliver.

The Detective Queen went quickly but quietly to work, and picked out the half-dozen men whom Buckskin had chosen for his Vigilance Committee, and ordered them to separately go down the gulch around the bend, as cautiously as possible, armed with weapons and lassoes, and there wait.

CHAPTER XI.

A GENERAL SUSPENSION.

DENVER DOLL did not accompany the party, but put them under the guidance of Little Bill, in whom she had grown to have all sorts of confidence.

Gulliver from Lilliput also lingered behind, and

when on being asked the reason why, he explained to Doll, whom he had followed to the hotel:

"Wull, fairest Lilliputian, I will tell ye," he said, disgorging a huge quid and hurling it out of doors; "I'll unbuzzom myself, so that ye wou'd allow there's nothin' cowardly about me. Ye see, I'm in love—despritle in love, for the first time in my life, an' I jedged aforehand that should I go inter battle an' get salivated, I might never be able to reach the summit of my aspirations. So I stayed behind. An' now, I want to ax a favor o' you, nuum."

"What is it, Gulliver?" Doll demanded in curiosity.

"Why, ye see, I want ye ter intercede for me w' my dory, who don't 'spicion that I keef fer one rib in her corset. I want ye jest to bite a hunk out o' her wax-like ear, and then whisper to her that I love her, hev got thirty pound o' coined bar an' three mules, and want to harness on ter her as my leader thru' this weary vale o' tears."

"But who is this amorita of your fancy, Gulliver?"

"Who? Who else, indeed, but the queen o' royal beauty, Sal Slap!"

"What! that old termagant?"

"Perzactly! Ef eveyer thar war mortal business in mortal woman it sticks right out ov old Sal, by gum! An' then, tew boot, she's so pritty and fawn-like, that I allow she an' me would make an excellent match."

"Well, I'll see what I can do for you, by and by," Doll said, turning away, her face clouded with anxiety and apprehension.

She was apprehensive lest Big Buckskin might be killed ere assistance could reach him, for he had told her that the Murdocks were his deadly enemies, and would kill him at sight if they got a chance.

And no wonder she was keenly worried about him, for she had grown to admire him greatly, and was not blind to the fact that the same feeling was in a measure returned by him.

"I've one satisfaction," she mused, as she entered the hotel. "If they do not succeed in rescuing Buckskin, Jack Murdock shall swing for it."

She then went to the outlaw's room. To her unbounded astonishment she found the door unlocked, and Mr. Jack minus.

For a moment she was thunderstruck and her disappointment was keen. Then she set to work to find out how the outlaw procured liberation.

"Me set 'Melican man free," John Wah, a domestic, said, on being questioned. "Findee 'Melican in room—hear him callee; when pass door. Tink he lockee up by mistake, an' lettee him outee, allee same. Muchee ticklee him."

Giving the stupid Celestial a cuff beside the head, Doll went out of doors, but of course Jack Murdock had taken all care to make his escape. It might as well be added right here, that he was never again seen around Bill's Bonanza after that.

Deeply excited and angered over the disappointment, Doll turned about, when a wheezing voice spoke in her ear:

"Excuse me, fair lady—my name is Gum—George Washington Gum, and I am introducing a number of variable books."

"Go to blazes!" Doll cried. "You cannot fool me with any of your book nonsense, Mr. Rack-a-bone! You'll have to pick up some other greeny."

"If I am not what I represent, what do you take me for?" Gum demanded, rather tartly.

"It would be a difficult job to tell what you are," Doll retorted, "in some respects, but of one thing I am satisfied—you are either a detective, or else a blamed fool!"

"I lay no claim to the latter calling, whatever."

"Then, you are a detective?"

"Privately, to you, yes. I am John Stark, the London 'shadow.' I would not tell you this, only I have noticed that you wear a U. S. badge."

"Thanks for your confidence. Who are you here after?"

"Sir Royal Rignold, better known in London as Jack De Haven, the forger and burglar."

"You don't say! And so this worthy knight is wanted by the law?"

"Yes; I am now daily awaiting a requisition from the Government, so that I can arrest him and take him back. I shall have to watch him closely or he will escape me yet."

"Not while I'm around. I'll corral the game for you to-night, perhaps. Walk back to the hotel with me, and I'll let you into my plans, which you'll agree are good."

He obeyed, and as they sauntered along, Doll came to a full understanding with him, and arrangements were made that will hereafterward be explained.

Let us follow the Vigilantes, who had set out to capture the outlaws.

It was not long after the Detective Queen had given them orders before they were all collected in the gulch below the bend, Little Bill included.

The stalwart, bearded miners looked down upon their youthful captain rather doubtfully, for he didn't appear much like one born to command; yet Doll had expressly stipulated that the attack should be made under his direction.

"Well, Bub, we're ready, an' ef you're major-general, jest spit out yer orders," one miner said, dryly.

Bill squinted one eye and looked over his company critically.

"Wull, I guess you'll all pass muster!" he observed. "I spoke you've all sed your catechisms. It's best, tho' ef ye foller my lead, I'll fetch ye out a-swimm'n'. The cave's down a ways farder. So come along as keeful as a fly in the butter."

And drawing a pistol, he led the march.

Half a mile they proceeded, and then Little Bill pointed up the mountain side, to a spot nearly a

quarter of a mile distant, where two outcropping ledges were visible.

"The den is betwixt them two ledges," he announced, "an' by takin' the bear path that starts in here, you can reach the upper ledge. Light out, now."

Understanding the balance of the plan, the Vigilantes began to creep cautiously toward their destination, while Little Bill skulked along the base of the gulch until he gained a good hiding place in a clump of bushes, directly beneath and opposite the mouth of the cave.

He then waited until he heard the apparent scream of a hawk, which warned him that the Vigilantes were ready.

Bill then sent up a series of piercing screams, which were like those of a woman in dire distress.

An instant later, from his concealment, he saw three white men and one Indian rush from the cave and gaze down into the gulch.

At the same instant, four lassoes dropped with precision from above, and in a moment more four outlaws were dangling between the upper and lower ledges.

Nor did the Vigilantes take the trouble to draw the victims to the upper ledge, but, instead, fastened the lariats so as to leave them suspended in mid-air.

And thus they hung until life became extinct, and the Murdock band of desperadoes was no more.

Little Bill was the first to reach and enter the cave, where he found Big Buckskin lying on his back, securely bound, but otherwise unharmed.

Buckskin embraced the boy warmly after his release, and also heartily thanked the men he had chosen for Vigilantes, not supposing, at the time, that they would be called upon to rescue him as their first service.

After a search of the cavern the party set out on their return.

On their arrival, the news of how Big Buckskin had been captured and rescued became generally known, and also the capture of the outlaws and their fate.

Big Buckskin was much surprised, too, when he found that Burk Murdock had been killed, and was mounted upon the pole, and at once ordered that the pole be cut down; but the people were too decidedly averse to this, and it was evident that the aerial spectacle must remain for the public's edification.

During the evening, feeling in low spirits, evidently, Sir Royal Rignold sought out one of the gambling dens, with the view of idling away a few hours.

He was soon successful in securing a man to play with, and being an expert, it was not long ere he had quite a stack of golden coin before him.

The other fellow finally backed out and sought another table.

He had hardly departed, when a rough-looking bummer approached the nobleman and helped himself to a seat.

"Ello! Mr. Rignold. 'Ow's yer 'ealth?" he saluted, familiarly.

"None of your business. What d'ye want?" Sir Royal demanded, savagely.

"Nothin' much. I jest reckernized ye, and thor't I'd make yer acquaintance, since I was sent here for that purpose."

"You sent here?" Sir Royal gasped, his face growing a shade whiter, and a hunted glare coming into his eyes.

"Yas," the chap went on, "I was sent by Jim Brady."

Sir Royal appeared both excited and relieved.

"Indeed!" he said. "What news did Brady send?"

"Bad," the other declared, grimly. "Stark, the London sleuth, is here after you."

"How do you know this?"

"Easy enough. I have seen him here in the camp. As soon as he gets a requisition, he means to nab you without ceremony."

"Furies seized the fellow! Is he in disguise?"

"Yes; he's playin' up book-agent as a blind."

"Then I have seen him."

"Probably. Now, there's no time to lose let me tell you. You want to skin out of this town as lively as you know how."

"I cannot get away at once. I am to marry Jubal Andre's daughter to-morrow night!"

"You are a fool!"

"Sir!"

"I repeat it—you are a fool. Your Irish lassie is here!"

"Bah! you lie!"

"No, I do not. She is here, and waiting for the marriage-time, so that she can step forward and denounce you."

"Great Heaven! what am I to do?"

"Well, jest you follow my advice an' I'll help you out. Bud Backus never went back on Jim Brady's pals yet."

"Well, what have you to propose?" Rignold asked eagerly.

It was evident that he was anxious for some avenue of escape from the menacing peril.

"You are going to marry?"

"By all means, yes!"

"Then it must be very quietly and secretly done. The best plan would be to have the ceremony performed in the gulch, outside of the town, where there would be no interruption, and from where you could begin your flight. I noticed a suitable spot, half a mile up the gulch. You'd better arrange to have the thing done up to-night, and get out of this vicinity."

"You are right, I guess. I will do so. Say nine,

to-night, at the Indian picture rocks, half a mile up the gulch."

"All right. I'll undertake to have some horses there at that hour."

"Very well. But, there is another thing. I want you to put that Irish idiot out of the way."

"Humph! I reckon not," Backus grunted. "I ain't no regular parson, I ain't; but I reckon I'm a leetle above committin' murder."

"Pshaw! your scruples will have a fall some day," Rignold gritted. "Wouldn't a hundred dollars stir you up?"

"No nor ten times that amount. I cannot be bought to woman murder."

"Then tell me where the cursed woman is, and I'll do the job myself!"

"Even that I cannot do. I was sent heer to warn ye an' help ye escape the officers. That's as far as I have anything to do with ye."

"Humph! I suppose you'll be at the picture rocks to-night?"

"Of course."

"You can go then."

And the rough-looking individual arose and shuffled off while Sir Royal lit a cigar and left the saloon.

"I would that I were a thousand miles away!" he muttered.

CHAPTER XII.

GULLIVER'S BIG RAISE.

THE death of the outlaws had been a serious disappointment to Jubal Andre, who had clung to the belief that Burk Murdock would yet come to terms, and put Big Buckskin out of the way.

That hope was now dissipated, however, and the scheming villain knew that what was done he must do himself. Fearful was he that something would happen to prevent his daughter's marriage with Sir Royal.

His heart was set upon that, for it would make Agnes the mistress of Castle Chelton, and that would of course give him back his old position as bailiff.

If a marriage were attempted by Sir Royal and Agnes, there could be little doubt but what Big Buckskin would interfere and stop it, which would be disastrous.

Nothing, therefore, remained more imperative than that Big Buckskin should be put out of the way, and that at once.

And it was equally plain to him that he must attend to the job himself.

So he set to work and studied over a number of plans, and finally decided upon one which he calculated might work.

In former days he had been an expert swordsman and fencing-master. And even though out of practice, he was sanguine that he could hold his own with such a man as Big Buckskin, who, he allowed, would not be likely to understand the manual at arms.

Accordingly he brought out two fine blades from his trunk, and gave them a furbishing, after which he sat down at a table and wrote the following message:

"BIG BUCKSKIN:—You must know that, as enemies, we cannot conveniently dwell in the same camp. In order to settle who shall be master, I challenge you to meet me at the northern outskirts of the town, immediately on receipt of this, and we will decide the matter with swords."

"JUBAL ANDRE."

Just at dusk he hired a man to convey the message to the sport; while armed with the swords, he set out for the appointed place of meeting.

Here he waited.

It was not long ere a footstep sounded near at hand, and the manly figure of Big Buckskin stood before him.

"Well, I am here, Jubal Andre!" the sport said, "though I'll admit that I was surprised to receive a challenge from you. I did not think you had so much pluck."

"Oh! you didn't? Well, you evidently see your mistake. I am just plucky enough to face a dozen loafers like you."

"Probably because you think you have an easy thing on me with the sword, which is very likely the case. Still, you have challenged, and I am not the man to refuse any man the chance to get satisfaction out of me, if it is in him. Give me one of your slaughterin' blades."

Keeping the best one for himself, the ex-bailiff cast the other upon the ground, at Big Buckskin's feet.

"There! take it, and stand on your guard," he cried, fiercely. "I came here to kill you, and free my child, and the harder you make me work the greater will be my triumph when I run you through!"

"All right! When you do run me through you can well brag of it," Big Buckskin answered, composedly.

The two foes then stepped forward within striking distance, their weapons held in a firm grasp, and their eyes gleaming sternly.

Clash! clash!

Parry! feint! lunge!

Clash! clash!

Swiftly and with great force did the deadly blades flash through the air, blow meeting blow, and neither man apparently gaining any advantage.

In fact, the ardor of Jubal Andre seemed a good deal dampened, so to speak, for not only did he soon

find that Big Buckskin struck a tremendous blow, but that he was also up to all the important little arts of fencing.

It had a depressing effect upon Jubal Andre to know this, for with the knowledge came the additional realization that one little opening left by him would be likely to lose him his life.

Buckskin was as cool and composed as a man well could be. He did not betray any anxiety for his own safety; on the contrary, he appeared to be rather confident that he would be the victor.

The duel soon came to an abrupt end. By a tremendous blow, Buckskin broke his adversary's blade in twain, and—

Jubal Andre turned like a flash, and ran for his life!

In order to add to his terrors, the sport gave chase for a few moments, and then purposely allowed the cowardly wretch to escape.

Sir Royal Rignold did not find his betrothed at the shanty, on his arrival there from the gambling den.

Miss Andre had gone out, some minutes before, for a breath of fresh air.

The camp, at eventide, was not the least dangerous place for a lady to wander about, but the young woman prided herself that she was not afraid, and set out boldly.

During her stroll, as luck would have it, she met the redoubtable Gulliver from Lilliput, who blocked her path, with an indescribable grin upon his face.

"Evenin' to yer, mum!" he saluted. "D'ye want a beau ter see ye hum? Ef ye does, I'm in the market. Gulliver is my handle—Gulliver from Lilliput, you bet!"

"Sir!" Miss Andre cried, coldly. "Please be kind enough to step aside, and allow me to pass!"

"Not by a jugful!" Gulliver responded. "I jist know what I'm about. I'm bizness, I am! I've heard it said ye'd pay a right peart sum to hev that cuss, Big Buckskin, put out o' the way! Ain't that so?"

Agnes Andre's face underwent a change of expression, and her eyes gleamed dangerously.

"So I would!" she replied, in a hissing tone. "He is the very curse of my life. He stands between me and happiness, wealth and position!"

"Perzactly. Know jest how it is. Now what'll you give to have that galoot put so fur under ground that he can't never burrow out agin?"

Agnes Andre was silent.

She was considering how to act.

Everything was at stake, and something must be done at once.

She knew that her father was not at the shanty, and that his money was.

Why not take the matter into her own hands, and hire this man to do the work the Murdocks had left undone?

"What will you charge? Remember, the job must be done at once!"

"Five thousand dollars!" Gulliver declared. "Guv me that, an' ye'll hear o' Big Buckskin's death within the next hour."

"Then come with me."

She went swiftly back to her shanty residence, secured the sum demanded by the giant, and gave it to him.

"All right!" Gulliver announced, after counting it. "Jest ye linger about the camp a bit, and when ye hear several pistol-shots, yer case is non *compos mentus*."

He then trotted serenely off, leaving Miss Andre slightly in doubt as to whether she had done right in giving him the money.

How far the giant would have gone is hard to say, had not an unforeseen emergency arose in the shape of a revolver, which was thrust against his heart by no less a personage than Little Bill Bethel.

"I say, hold up thar, shorty!" the juvenile warned, in tones of command. "Jest you move another step, without my permission, and I'll put a bullet in yer gizzard!"

"What's the matter with you?" Gulliver thundered. "Put up yer weepin, afore I chew your head off."

"Can't do that, honeysuckle. Afore ye could bite thru my sculp I kin hev six tunnels drilled right thru your system!" the youngster retorted, triumphantly.

And Gulliver knew he spoke the truth.

"What d'ye want?" he demanded.

"You'll find out!" Little Bill suggested. "What was you jest slopin' for?"

"Direct fer the Guzzler's Glory, ter git my old b'ller full o' forty-rod, which they do say is good ter keep b'llers from rustin' on the inside."

"Look out! None of your lyn', or I'll salivate you this minnit. Ye war goin' fer to drap Big Buckskin, warn't ye?"

"He! he! he! Heerd that job I put up on the gal, didn't ye? Soak me if I didn't capter her shekels like a charm. Five thousan' at a pop! Jest think uv it! Enuff to keep my b'ller filled fer a month!"

"Then you didn't intend to harm Big Buckskin, hey?"

"Sartin not! Et jest occurred to me as how my exchequer war gettin' low, an' I'd better bleed some fat pocket-book. Lor' bless ye, lad, I wouldn't hurt a hair on Big Buck's pate fer all ther gold thar is in these mountings; not ef I knows myself!"

"Waal, I should advise ye not ter try it, fer if ye do, thar's a powerful sartainty thar'll a bumble-bee buzz right thru your pericranium. So now, waltz!"

Gulliver was not slow in obeying, for he was evidently afraid of that remarkable lad.

When he was gone, Bill sauntered back to the

hotel and took a turn at bar-tending, well pleased at his success in bluffing down a man of Gulliver's huge proportions.

"Bet the gal wull knock her heels tergether when she finds how she's bin soaked," he muttered. "Serves her right, durn her!"

After his flight from the presence of Big Buckskin, Jubal Andre made his way back to town in a humor that was bad, to say the least.

"Beaten again," he whined to himself. "It seems as if ill luck is continually dogging me since I have come to this accursed town. Big Buckskin has the luck of a cat, as regards his life, and it is apparent that I have no business to attempt taking it. What is to be done I do not know."

As he entered the town, he saw Sal Slap leave the Guzzler's Glory, and walk over toward the Bonanza Hotel.

His suspicions became at once aroused.

"What the blazes is the ugly she-tiger going there for?" he muttered.

The substance of their previous interview then flashed across his mind.

"Can it be possible that the boy is there, and she is going to betray his identity to Big Buckskin?"

Then came another thought. He had twice seen Little Bill tending bar, and had also seen him several times on the hotel veranda.

"By heaven! I believe I have made a discovery!" he gasped. "That youngster is the son of Buckskin and Agnes, and Sal Slap is going to give away the secret, curses be on her!"

The thought made him fairly desperate, and he quickened his pace with a view of overtaking her.

But she had disappeared within the hotel ere he reached it.

"Oh! but I'm not baffled yet!" he snarled, crouching down behind a rock. "I'll waylay her when she comes back, and if she has given up the secret, I will murder her! To capture the boy then, will be but little trouble. Once he is in my power, I can bring Big Buckskin into a trap to suit me!"

And a maliciously satisfactory chuckle escaped him, in anticipation of the impending victory.

An hour passed.

People went to and fro through the gulch, but none of them came very near his place of concealment.

He saw Sir Royal several times, and reckoned that he was searching for him, but he was determined not to leave his post at all hazards, until he saw Sal Slap.

Still the minutes continued to drag by, and Andre settled into a fit of quiet cursing over the ill-luck that was attending his vigil.

Presently, a man passed near to where he was crouching, and he saw that it was Big Buckskin, whose footsteps were directed toward the Bonanza.

"Ah! but I have you, now!" the villain hissed, and drawing his revolver he fired!

Not once, but six times, each shot being leveled at the back of the sport.

Bang! bang! bang!

Bang! bang! bang!

Sharp and clear the echoes rung out through the gulch!

And what was the result?

There came back a taunting, sarcastic laugh, while Big Buckskin walked leisurely on toward the hotel, not even deigning to look around to see who had attacked him.

Jubal Andre gazed after him like one dumfounded.

What spell of witchery was this?

He was positive that every shot he had fired had hit the sport in the back, as the space between them was not sufficient to warrant a "miss," even by the poorest marksman, which the old villain was not, by any means.

Yet the bullets had not taken effect, for surely no human being with six bullets in his back could walk away with as much sang froid as Big Buckskin did.

"Curses on him!" Andre hissed. "He is certainly leagued with infernal power; or else he wears some protective device that renders him bullet-proof. Never mind! I may get a chance at him again. I'll try him above the shoulders, then, and see if he will refuse lead there!"

"Ye wull, hey?" a voice exclaimed, close to his ear, which caused him to start violently. "Ye wull, hey? Neow, my Christian friend, mebbe it would be more appropriate and condescendingly perillous not to count yer chickens afore they're hatched. I've allus observed that sech wisdom brought forth better results. My name is Gulliver, an' I'm jest fresh arrived from Lilliput!"

It was the giant, in truth, and he held a revolver of like gigantic size leveled at the mock parson's head.

CHAPTER XIII.

SAL SLAP'S DISCLOSURE—AND THE MIDNIGHT WEDDING.

SAL SLAP did not gain an immediate interview with Denver Doll on her arrival at the hotel, but was told to wait in the office until Doll came down from her room.

While she was waiting Little Bill came into the office, attired for the street.

No longer a ragged, uncouth-looking urchin was William, but a decidedly tony, well-dressed lad.

A quizzical expression came over his intelligent face as he saw Sal Slap.

"Hello, Willie!" she said, softly. "You are lookin' right nice to-night!"

"Pshaw! you don't say so, Sally. For heaven's don't get mashed on me! What are you doing here?"

"Waiting to get an interview with Denver Doll, my lad."

"Humph! what do you want of her?"

"It will make your eyes bung out, boy, when you learn."

"Phew! must be somethin' exqueordinary then?"

"You bet it is! But don't ax me no questions."

"Durn it, don't be so tight-lipped. Spill out, ef it's anything worth knowin'. Goin' ter 'dopt me, an' make me your heir?"

"No!"

"Some one want to marry me?"

"Not for years yet, you ten-year-old general!"

"Bah! Come now, you're a sweet, purty duckling of a gal—ain't ye goin' ter pan out the secret?"

"No, no! You run away for awhile, and when you come back you'll know all about it."

"All right. But mind, don't fool me, or I'll run over and clean out yer ranch!"

"You'll know!" Sal repeated, grimly.

Satisfied that he would gain nothing by teasing her, William arranged his tie and sauntered out for an evening stroll.

After he was gone, Sal took out a Testament and began to read, seeming deeply interested.

After a long wait Denver Doll came down-stairs.

She was greatly surprised to see the hag, who had never bothered her since the Guzzler's Glory was started.

"Good-evening, Dolly!" Mrs. Slap greeted, closing her Testament. "I have called to see you on important business. Can I see you privately?"

"If necessary, yes. Come with me," and she led the way to the room in the rear of the office, where a light was burning.

"Now please be brief!" Doll said, "for I have much business to attend to."

Sal was silent a moment, then she abruptly turned to Doll:

"D'ye think the Lord would forgive me, gal, ef I war to lead a better life?" she asked.

Doll was surprised.

"Well, I don't know as I can answer that question," she responded. "We all know that His is a merciful and forgiving spirit. Did He not give up His own life for us?"

"So I've heard tell. Well, anyhow, I've made up my mind to bust up the ranch and lead a better life. Mebbe it won't be too late for me yet."

"I am glad of your resolution, and will pray that you stick to it."

"Thank ye! An' now, as a starter toward doin' good, I've a disclosure to make. Did Big Buckskin ever tell ye the story o' his bein' married?"

"Yes, yes!"

"To Andre's gal?"

"Yes."

"Well, a child was born!"

"Yes."

"Does he know what became of it, gal?"

"No. He suspects that the Andres had it smuggled off."

"So they did. I did the job, and was to kill it, but my heart kicked, and I put it in kindly hands. I even know where it is now!"

Big Buckskin's voice was heard in the office just then.

Doll sprung to the door and called him in.

When he was seated Doll said:

"Mr. Wilton, I have something to surprise you. This lady, Mrs. Slap, knows where your lost son is!"

"What?" Buckskin cried, excitedly.

"It's so," Sal averred. "Your son is alive and well, and I saw him not half an hour ago."

"God be praised! Tell me, woman, where is he?"

"He has been as under a mother's care for some months," Sal returned, with a significant glance at Doll.

"What! Is it possible you mean Little Bill?" the Detective Queen cried.

"The werry same. I've kept track o' the kid ever since I war hired by Jubal Andre to kill him, when he war a baby."

Big Buckskin bowed his head in his hands and was silent for some minutes.

When he looked up there were tears in his eyes.

"This is the happiest hom I have known for years," he said. "I never dreamed Little Bill was my son, but I am none the less proud of him. And I have much to thank you both for, besides what pecuniary reward you can name."

"No reward is necessary," Sal at once answered. "I'm only glad to get rid o' the weight on my conscience. But let me give ye a little advice, free gratis. Don't never let on to the boy who his mother is, fer she is a reproach to the both of you."

"You are right. It will be better for the boy to remain in ignorance of the sort of a mother he has. I will now go and find him."

"No! no!" Denver Doll demurred. "I have something important to say to you both. Bill will be all right, and you had best not explain anything to him until to-morrow morning."

She then spoke to her two auditors in low, rapid tones for several minutes, after which Sal Slap took her departure.

Let us return to our friend Gulliver and his catch, Jubal Andre.

The latter swore furiously when he saw that he was trapped.

"What the devil do you mean?" he savagely questioned.

"I mean that I've cotched ye in a purty leetle scrape, an' ef ye don't disgorge I'm goin' to peg ye in the noddle."

"Man, I have no money!"

"Git out! Fellers like you don't go broke, an' don't ye ferget it! Jest tumble out yer pockets, an' yer jewelery, an' I'll let ye go free, 'ca'se I see'd Buckskin d'ldn't count ye wuth noticin'. Ef ye re-

fuse I'll blow yer head off, sure's I'm the feller what ten thousand Lilliputians couldn't conquer."

Seeing nothing more sensible to do, the entrapped assassin grumblingly obeyed, and Gulliver prebited to the extent of some two hundred dollars.

"Now ye kin go," he said, "while I amble off and line my b'iler w' rust preventive."

Andre at once set out for his shanty, and on his way he saw Little Bill crossing the gulch.

Crouching in a shadow, he waited till the boy was within arm's reach of him, when he leaped forward and dealt him a blow that knocked him senseless to the ground.

With some cords he then bound his hands and feet, and carried him to the mouth of an abandoned drift, in the dark recesses of which he cast him down.

"I'll go and see what Rignold wants now," he muttered.

It was his determination to say nothing to Agnes about the boy, but return in the morning, before day-break, and put an end to him.

On his arrival at the shanty he found both Sir Royal and Agnes waiting for him. The former appeared to be in a highly excited state, and was pacing the floor rapidly.

"Where in the world have you been?" he demanded as Andre entered. "I have been waiting for you over an hour, and searching for you everywhere."

"Indeed! Why, I've been about town. What do you want?"

"Enough! This marriage must take place at once, if at all, and I must immediately afterward leave for England, where I am wanted within a limited time as claimant to a fortune. A messenger named Backus has been sent after me, and he says if I do not start at once all is lost. He has proposed we have the ceremony performed outside of town, at nine o'clock, and that we then immediately start upon our journey."

"A good idea. But it is nine o'clock nearly already."

"Then get a priest and let's get at once to work. We will take no baggage whatever to incumber us until we get to New York. Is there a minister or priest in the camp, do you know?"

"Yes. One arrived yesterday and hung out his shingle."

"Then go fetch him at once, and we will start for the picture rocks, where the ceremony is to take place. It will be moonlight, and romantic."

A sharp rap came upon the door. Sir Royal sprang forward and opened it and admitted the bum-looking Englishman.

"Well, what's the matter?" Sir Royal inquired, sharply.

"Jig's up in *that* direction, so far as the weddin' is concerned. See'd that feller Stark meanderin' t'ward the picter rocks. Guess he smells a rat. So arranged a different lay-out."

"What?"

"Why, I bought off Sal Slap. She's shoo' up the place fer the night. 'Bout midnight ye re to con, one by one an' rap at the door, an' I'll admit yov. We'll hev the weddin' then, an' hosses cluss by, so we kin git a start at once."

"The she devil, Sal Slap, can't be trusted at all," Jubal Andre averred.

"Yes, she can. She said as how she had suthin' private to tell ye when ye come."

"Humph," was all the answer.

"Then it is understood that we will all meet at Sal Slap's at midnight, prepared for the journey," Sir Royal said. "Friend Andre, will you attend to the matter of securing the services of a minister?"

"I suppose so," was the reply.

The villain was not over pleased at the idea of having the wedding at the Guzzler's Glory, for he could but believe that Sal Slap's visit to the Bonanza Hotel had been to give up the secret of the whereabouts of Big Buckskin's son.

When the Englishman had departed Andre left the shanty and engaged the newly-arrived clergyman, after which he directed his footsteps toward the mining-drift.

"I'll do for the boy, at any rate, before I leave!" he gritted, drawing a knife and feeling its keen edge. "I hardly think Buckskin would follow us to England; but even if he should, there are surer facilities there for putting a man out of the way than in this treacherous country."

He approached the mouth of the drift and peered in.

As he did so a huge grizzly bear came lumbering toward him.

That was enough!

He turned and fled for dear life.

He was satisfied, beyond a doubt, that Little Bill was torn to pieces by the monster, long ere this.

So he made his way to a saloon, and after procuring a drink of liquor, returned to his shanty to await the coming of the midnight hour.

Midnight!

Quiet prevailed in Little Bill's Bonanza.

Every place of business was closed up for the night, and only here and there throughout the camp were lights seen burning.

Few people were abroad, and the most of these were making for their respective places of lodging.

The bright radiance of the moon fell down upon the town and revealed objects with startling distinctness, especially the aerial figure of Burk Murdock on the pole.

About half-past twelve the last of several muffled figures, rapped at the door of the Guzzler's Glory, and was admitted.

Inside, the saloon was but dimly lighted, and a monotonous silence prevailed.

Behind the bar Sal Slap stood, a grim expression upon her hard face.

In different parts of the room were seated the parties connected with the nocturnal affair, viz: Jubal Andre, Agnes, Sir Royal Rignold, and the bum-looking Englishman, Buckskin.

The last comer was the minister—a young, demure-looking man, who appeared to feel strangely out of place in the grog den.

"Well, I guess all parties are here," Jubal Andre announced, "and we will get through with the ceremony as soon as possible. Mrs. Slap, will you see that the front door is well locked to insure safety?"

"To be sure I will, dear Jubal," Sal replied, leaping over the bar as neatly as a dry-goods clerk could have done. "The door is well secured. By the way, Jubal dear, supposin' you and I hitch up together, while the preacher is heer. You know we've bin lovin' each other these many years, an' now's jest the time to show how two lovin' hearts will allus cling together."

"Woman, are you mad?" Jubal Andre gasped. "Nary a time!" Sal declared; "nor ye hadn't better git me mad nuther. I'm a screamer when I'm mad—tooth an' toe-nail! Ef ye don't want me, Jubal, all yer got to do is ter say so!"

"Of course I wouldn't have you! I'd as quick marry an orang-outang!"

"Mebbe one o' them would mate ye better. Well, all slide up an' have a drink wi' me, an' then we'll start the weddin'!"

The invitation was accepted, more, probably, for the sake of humoring the hag than for any other reason, though it was noticeable that neither even Agnes Andre nor the minister took stinky drinks.

Order was then called, and the contracting parties stood up, both very pale and evidently laboring under considerable agitation.

The minister produced his book and slowly and clearly read the marriage service, received the answers, and pronounced Sir Royal Rignold and Agnes Andre man and wife.

The following instant a rear door opened and a string of persons entered the bar-room.

CHAPTER XIV.

WONDER UPON WONDER, AND ALL IS WELL.

THERE had been, no doubt, many artistic and striking tableaux within the Guzzler's Glory during Sal Slap's reign as proprietress, but it is safe to say there was never one to equal that which marked the entrance of the new-comers following the marriage ceremony.

The Andre-Rignold party stood aghast, white and speechless.

In the lead of the entering party was the superannuated man of books—George Washington Gum, alias Stark, the detective.

Following him came Big Buckskin, with Nellie Kelly leaning upon his arm, Old Prowler, Gulliver from Lilliput and a blue-suited stranger who looked like an officer.

"Betrayed!" Jubal Andre gasped, attempting to draw a revolver.

"And trapped," the bum-looking Englishman added, pressing a pistol against the ex-bailiff's cheek.

"Jubal Andre, throw your weapon on the floor. You are my prisoner!"

"What for?" Andre demanded. "You have no right to arrest me!"

"Haven't I?" and off came a false wig and beard, revealing the resolute face of Denver Doll! "Hal! hal! my little decoy has worked even nicer than I at first anticipated. Jubal Andre, I arrest you for the several crimes of attempted murder, and also for being a 'fence' for a gang of counterfeiters in or near Boise City! Officer Sherry, I hand this man over to you."

The gentleman in blue clothes came forward, and Jubal Andre was handcuffed.

Denver Doll then turned to Agnes Andre, who, pale and faint, was supported by Sir Royal.

"Miss Andre, by the law of our country, I should by rights arrest you on two criminal charges; but believing you will feel punished enough by the developments that are to follow, I will, at the request of your husband, not arrest you for conspiring to murder your infant child, nor for the act of bigamy you have just committed."

"Husband! bigamy!" Sir Royal gasped, pushing the false woman from him.

"Ay! Sir Rignold. Big Buckskin was her husband until you lifted the burden from his shoulders. But she is no more a bigamist than you are, for yonder stands your deserted wife, whom I took from the merciless grasp of the world and nursed back to life."

Sir Royal swore furiously.

"I never married her!" he raved.

"You lie!" George Washington Gum cried, "and I can prove it. The priest still lives who performed the ceremony, although you hired men to kill him—you infernal demon! Ralph Rignold, at my instance Denver Doll will put you under arrest until I receive a U. S. requisition, when I will have the pleasure of conducting you back to England, and presenting you to the London courts as Mr. Jack De Haven, the ex-convict and burglar!"

"I will never surrender!" Sir Royal cried, furiously.

But he reckoned without his host; for he was seized from behind by Officer Sherry and held firmly, while Denver Doll adorned his wrists with handcuffs.

"I guess you'll come to terms," Doll said, with her provoking laugh. "We border folk know how to handle even worse characters than you bloody Henglish cracksmen."

"Curse you!" was all the reply the baffled bigamist could make.

"You are making arrests so freely," spoke up Agnes Andre, "I propose that you arrest yonder ruffian," indicating old Gulliver. "Not three hours ago he swindled me out of five thousand dollars—"

"Of my money, too, you hussy!" interrupted Jubal Andre, savagely.

"Which you, in turn, stole from Sir Royal!" sneered Agnes, "putting bogus stuff in place of it."

"Charming developments!" laughed Denver Doll. "How is this, Gulliver?"

"Oh! the gal gave me the swag as pay fer killin' Buckskin, but arter I got it, I felt suddenly pious, an' couldn't do the job," the giant replied, with a grin. "I afterwards caught Jubal thar, a-shutin' at Buckskin, and I made him dish out, too!"

"Good for you! I opine that you're entitled to all you have got. And now, friends, these few arrests do not terminate to-night's little surprise, for I have something else to say for the benefit of those present."

"Years ago, young Sir Clifford Chelton, of Chelton Castle, England, forsook his home, ran away, and became lost to all those who loved him. A long search was made, but he could not be found, and was given up as dead. That is, by all except his father, Sir Hugh."

"Sir Hugh could never give it up but what his son would be found, and with a resolve to find him, he left England to devote his life to the search, purposely leaving behind him evidence to lead to the belief that he had committed suicide."

"This is false!" Sir Royal cried, alarmed at the prospect of the great Chelton estate being taken from him.

"It is not. There stands Sir Hugh Chelton, alive and well!"

And she turned and pointed to Old Prowler, who stood near at hand.

The old man seemed taken by surprise.

"By all things wonderful, how did you find out my secret?" he cried, throwing off the long white false beard and wig, and standing before them—a hale and hearty-looking old gent—the real Sir Hugh, sure enough!

"I suspected it from the first you told me of the family matter. The longer grew our intimacy, the firmer did the suspicion become an established certainty in my mind. But, let me proceed with my story: Sir Hugh's search seemed useless and fruitless. He grew fatigued and weary, and I guess, finally, when he reached this camp, he was about satisfied that 'twas no use to search further."

"You are right!" Sir Hugh assented.

"But with your falling courage," Denver Doll went on, "my interest was aroused, and I made up my mind to find Sir Clifford Chelton, and you can jest bet yer best pair o' boots I've found him."

"What! what!" Sir Hugh cried, excitedly.

"Bah! she lies!" roared Sir Royal Rignold, savagely.

"I do not!" replied Denver Doll. "The old saying, 'It's not always best to forsake the old for the new,' is extremely applicable in this case, as Miss Andre will undoubtedly understand, when I state that her wronged first husband, Big Buckskin, is the real Sir Clifford Chelton!"

Agnes Andre uttered a gasping cry.

Sir Hugh sprung forward.

"My son! my long-lost son! Can this be true?" he asked, with tearful eyes.

"It is true that I am Clifford Chelton, but how the blazes this ferret-eyed girl ever found it out is beyond my comprehension," the sport said, as he warmly embraced his parent.

"Intuition did it," Doll explained, with a laugh.

"And now, as matters have terminated so well through the medium of my little decoy trick, I opine we better adjourn the meeting."

And it was adjourned.

The prisoners, and all hands except Sal Slap and Agnes Andre, went to the Bonanza Hotel.

Agnes, wicked, crushed woman of the world, went back to the shanty alone and unpitied, all her grand schemes for the future now dissipated into nothingness and deep disgrace.

Hers was a rich reward—richly deserved.

On the arrival of the main party at the hotel, the prisoners were placed in the room in the rear of the office.

Little Bill had got back, and was up, waiting for Doll.

The bonds Jubal Andre had placed upon him were not tight, and he was free and out of the drift almost as soon as the villain was out of sight, and long before the bear had entered it.

As soon as Big Buckskin saw him, he clasped him to his breast warmly.

"My son! my son!" he murmured.

"Git out!" Bill retorted. "What you givin' us? I ain't your kid."

"But you are, as Denver Doll will tell you, and Old Prowler, here, as you knew him, is your grandfather."

Denver Doll then explained what was advisable to him, and Bill listened curiously.

"Well, that's a rum go. ain't it?" he remarked. "Suthin' like a Sunday-skewl hymn. So you're goin' over the puddle, eh, dad?"

"Yes—back to grand old Castle Chelton, the home of my youth. You are to go along."

"Well, I might go and look over the ranch, but ye see I ain't no time to devote to relations. Biz is rushin' now. Asides, 'Merica's the place fur William, whar every galoot's his own king; then, too, I an' Dollbaby aire sworn partners, you bet!"

A few words to close.

Jubal Andre and Sir Royal escaped before morning

and were never seen in Idaho again. During their guard's absence a board had been pried off the side of the building, which formed one of the walls of the room, and they had crawled out through this opening and escaped.

It was supposed that Agnes had hired the job done, and aided them to get away. Thus the law was, in these two cases, baffled, and Stark and Sherry were forced to set out on the search again.

A few weeks later Sir Hugh, Sir Clifford—or Big Buckskin—and Nellie Kelly started for Europe.

Before going, Buckskin made our heroine an offer of marriage, but she gracefully declined, stating that, although she thought a great deal of him, she was not yet prepared to marry—at least for a year or two.

When it came to part with Doll, Little Bill became nearly frantic, and no coaxing could tear him away from her.

And when Doll privately promised Buckskin that she and Bill would visit Castle Chelton, a year later, the handsome sport consented to leave his son behind.

"For," said he, "when I get you over the ocean, I hope to keep you both there, and Nellie Kelly shall be your lady's maid."

Sal kept her word.

She turned the Guzzler's Glory to the ground, married Gulliver from Lilliput, and the happy pair have bought a ranch in Idaho, and settled down.

Little Bill's Bonanza soon played out, and a few shanties only stand to mark its site.

Little Bill and Denver Doll, ever on the alert for sport and duty, were not long in stumbling into a fresh field of adventures, where sooner or later we will try to renew their acquaintance.

THE END.

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